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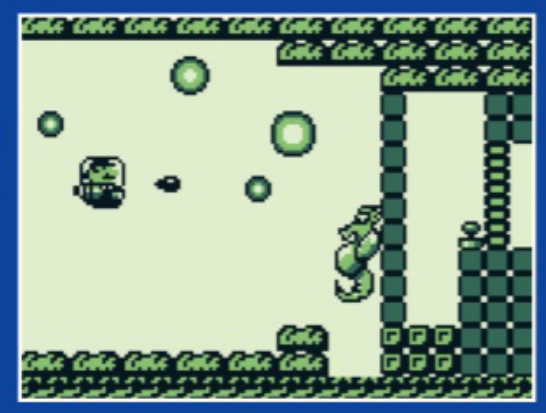


ULTIMATE GUIDE: SUPER MARIO LAND

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MARIO'S FIRST HANDHELD ADVENTURE

OLIVER FREY: A LEGACY OF ART

CELEBRATING ONE OF VINTAGE GAMING'S GREATEST ARTISTS

LEISURE SUIT LARRY

AL LOWE REVISITS HIS ICONIC LOTHARIO

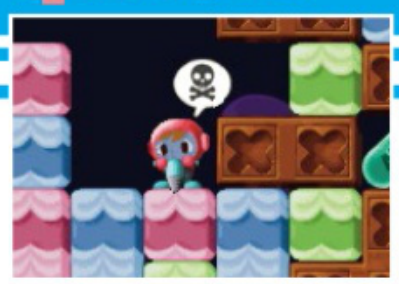
THE EVOLUTION OF CRIMSON SKIES

THE BOARD GAME IDEA THAT TOOK TO THE SKIES

40 YEARS OF THE

commodore 64

A YEAR-BY-YEAR LOOK BACK AT COMMODORE'S SENSATIONAL 8-BIT HOME COMPUTER



THE MAKING OF MR DRILLER

DRILLING TO THE CORE OF NAMCO'S CUTE PUZZLER

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COMMODORE 64 MEMORY?

DARRAN JONES

Probably seeing *IK+* for the first time while waiting for a bus outside Densham Computers. I always seemed to spot something new in the background whenever I looked.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Kingdom Hearts Final Mix*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

In the Craigavon Shopping Centre, just past the baked potato stall, there was a wee games shop where my brother and I put together our pocket money and bought Mastertronic games nearly every week. Fun times.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Resident Evil: Village*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

It has to be discovering Jeff Minter's games for the first time, while digging through a pile of *Commodore Format Power Packs* I'd been given.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sega Rally Championship*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

I've only played on a C64 once, it was *Predator*, I didn't think it was very good.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

PAUL DRURY

The first game I ever played on the C64 was *Twin Kingdom Valley*, bought from a computer show in London. Years later, I discovered I'd bought it directly from the author, Trevor Hall, which makes it an extra special memory for me.
Expertise: *Sheep In Space*
Currently playing: *Sheep In Space*
Favourite game of all time:

IAIN LEE

IO – insanely difficult and possibly one of the few games for that machine that still stands the test of time.
Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it.
Currently playing: *Doom Eternal*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

ANDREW FISHER

Publishing my own book on C64 games back in 2008 with a foreword by Jeff Minter, and the lovely feedback I got.
Experience: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *New Rally-X*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

RORY MILNE

I still remember seeing the C64 for the first time. My friend loaded-up *Chiller*, and to my extremely young ears the in-game music sounded like an orchestra.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Knight Lore*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

MARTYN CARROLL

When I was about nine, going around to my mate Rob's house and seeing *Rambo* load up on his C64 and hearing Martin Galway's music. That really put my Speccy in the shade.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Stray*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

LOADING...

Although it wasn't Commodore's first 8-bit home computer, the C64 is arguably the one that left the biggest impression on gamers. It certainly left one on me, and I remember being incredibly jealous of my friends who owned one. Arcade conversions like *Bubble Bobble* and *Bionic Commando* felt miles better than their CPC 464 counterparts, while the likes of *Armalyte* and *Katakis* proved I should have worked harder on my nan, because then I might have received Commodore's micro for my 14th birthday instead of Amstrad's.

I'm clearly not the only person to have fallen for the charms of the C64, because as we celebrate its 40th birthday there's still so much life in the old 'beige bread bin'. We celebrate the machine's long-lasting appeal in our huge 14-page feature, which not only looks back at every year the machine was active, but also interviews those whose lives have been changed by the popular home micro.

And if you're not one of those who fell in love with Commodore's machine, we've plenty more for you to enjoy, including articles on *Mr Driller*, *Super Mario Land*, *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, John Newcomer, *Crimson Skies*, and much more.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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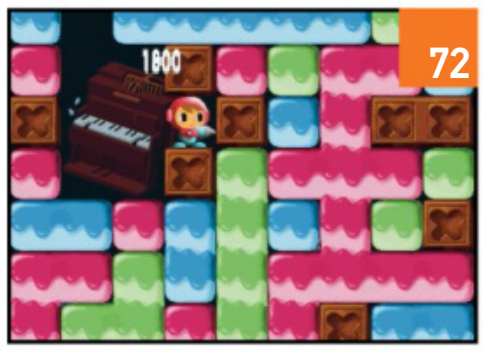
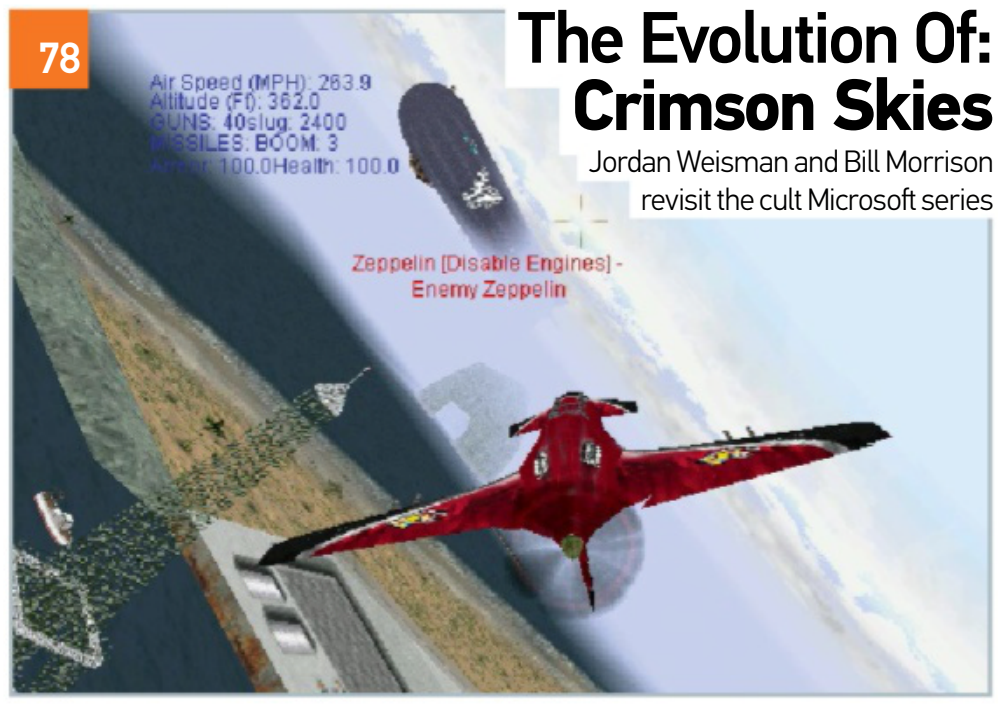


40 Years Of The Commodore 64
Paul Drury and Andrew Fisher offer a year-by-year account of Commodore's remarkable 8-bit home computer



The Evolution Of: Crimson Skies
Jordan Weisman and Bill Morrison revisit the cult Microsoft series

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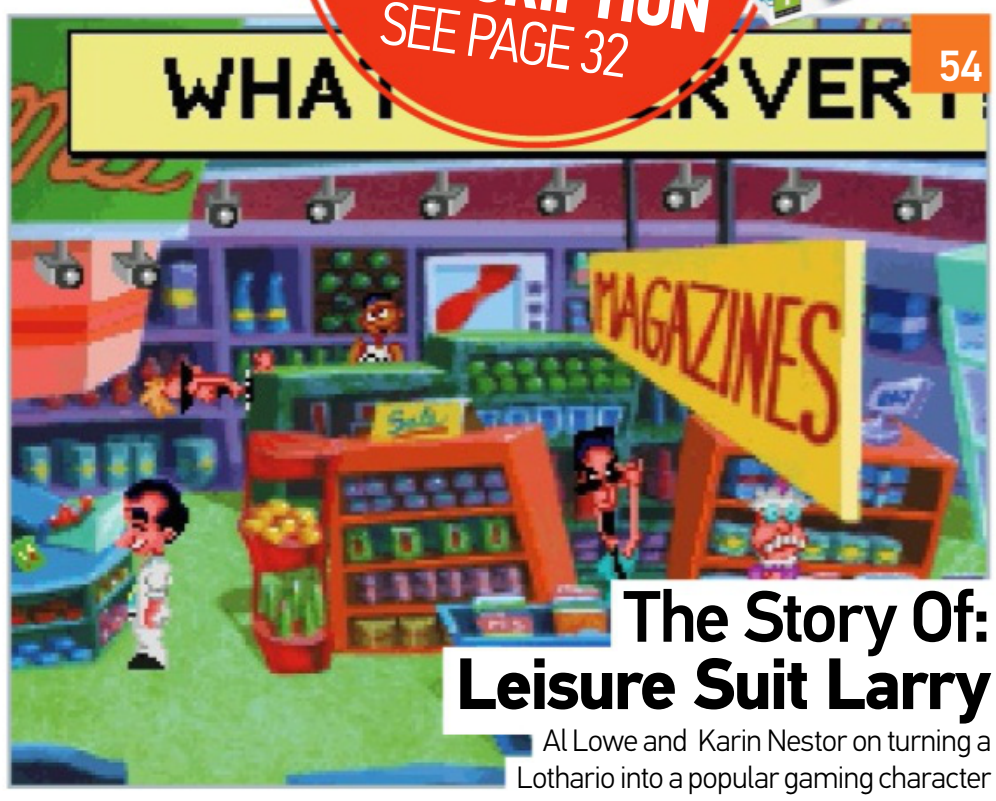

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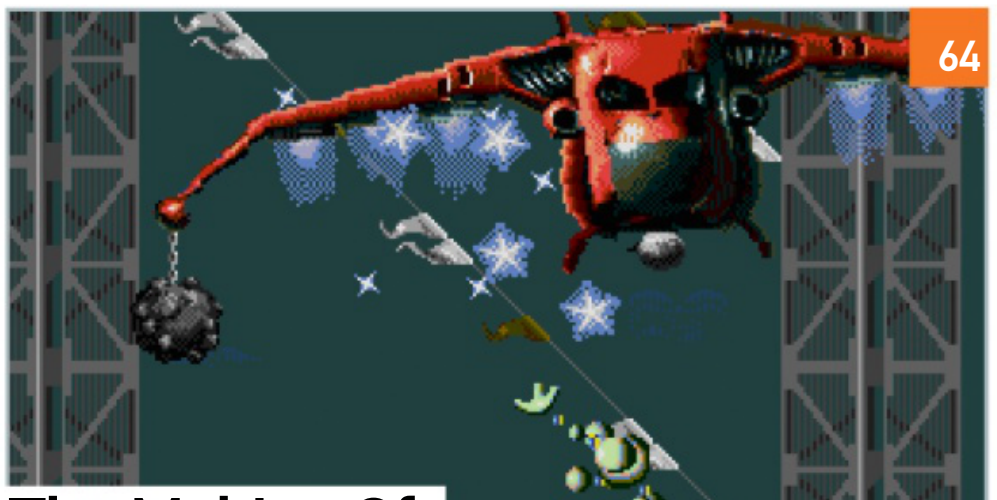

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Learn how wanting to push hardware limits led to Sega's impressive action platformer

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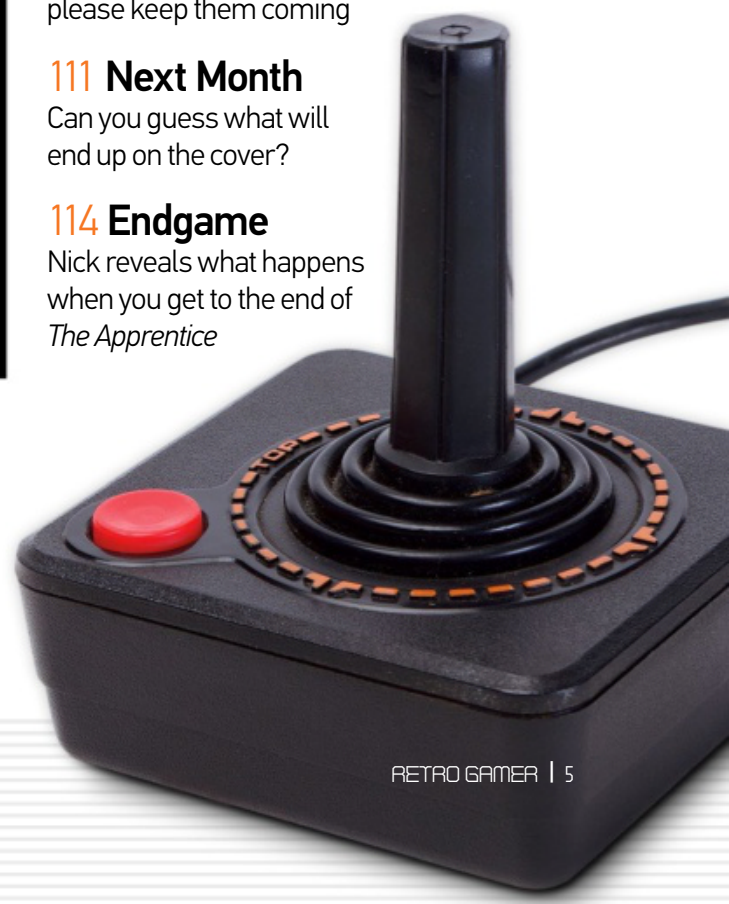

» Oliver's artwork did an amazing job of capturing the frantic and exhilarating action of *Speedball*.

OLIVER FREY: A LEGACY OF ART

We pay tribute to the acclaimed artist

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Friends and fans pay tribute to the legendary magazine artist

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Find out why our resident columnist felt sorry for the Commodore 64

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Nick heads into the *Colossal Cave* with Ken and Roberta Williams to discuss their new project

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It's the start of a brand-new retro gaming year, what on earth will Nick discover in January 2006?

If you were a gamer of the Eighties and Nineties it was impossible to ignore the kinetic artwork of Oliver Frey. His stunning compositions could be found adorning the covers of *Crash*, *Zzap!64* and *Amtix!*, and they were as exciting to look at as the games they were based on, sometimes more so.

Oliver formed Newsfield Publications with Roger Kean and his younger brother Franco in 1983. *Crash* magazine launched in 1984, with *Zzap!64* arriving the following year. *Amtix!* followed in late-1985, but it lacked the staying power of *Crash* and *Zzap!* and it was sold after 18 issues.

» Oliver's artwork for the first issue of *Crash* is every bit as iconic as the magazine.

Oliver's art could be found on the covers of those iconic magazines, and as a result his work became synonymous with the era. If you owned an 8-bit home computer and read any of Newsfield's mags it was impossible to separate the artist from the medium, because his touch seemed everywhere, whether it was on the covers of the magazines you bought, or the maps you were gazing at that were featured inside.

The rise of social media allowed many fans of Oliver's stunning art to get in touch with him and you'd see many retro gamers with black-and-white headshots of themselves that they had commissioned Oliver to draw for them. Oli's early work would often appear on covers of **Retro Gamer**, along with new commissions.

In 2021 Roger revealed that he was suffering from MND (motor neurone disease) and that Oliver had been caring for him. Sadly, a Facebook post from Roger revealed in June 2022 that Oliver was now suffering with inoperable cancer, but he was attempting a new type of treatment. Roger continued to give updates of Oliver's health where he could (his own illness makes it very hard for him to type) but also had to break the sad news that Oliver's brother Franco was in a coma after suffering from a massive brain bleed.

» (From left to right) Roger Kean, Oliver Frey, Nick Roberts and Chris Wilkins.

Just a few weeks later on 21 August, Fusion Retro Books shared a post on its official Facebook page. "It's with great sadness that I have to announce that Oliver Frey passed away this morning at 7.55. Rest in Peace Oli – hope you are up there in heaven painting the angels." Many flocked to social media to share their tributes, a move that truly touched Roger, who told everyone, "I lost today my friend, my companion and the love of my life." He then shared

» Artist Wil Overton was a big fan of Oliver's detailed maps.

many of his favourite photos of Oliver. Nick Roberts, worked with Oliver at *Crash* and remembers him fondly. "I had known Oli since 1987 when I started as a writer on *Crash* magazine, and often marvelled at how he could turn the most mundane-looking Spectrum games into incredible magazine covers," he posted.

Julian Rignall worked on *Zapp!64* with Oliver. He shared a number of his favourite covers and images on Twitter, signing off with, "This is how I will always remember Oli. Airbrush in hand, busy working on the next amazing cover. Rest in peace my friend."

Mark R Jones was an artist for Ocean Software during the Eighties and first encountered Oliver's art on the cover of *Crash* issue 5. "I bought myself a copy and so started my obsession with the magazine that has lasted nearly 40 years," he says. Luckily for Mark, his relationship with Oliver went a little bit

» Oliver created this fantastic art for issue 142's The Bluffer's Guide To Shoot-'Em-Ups.

WAR PICTURE LIBRARY No 585
1'3
DEATH'S-HEAD GENERAL
WAR PICTURE LIBRARY No 574
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ENGLAND'S LAST HOPE
BIG NEWS ! 8 EXTRA PAGES ! Exciting story and feature.
LET'S GO, MEN !
THE LEAD'S COMING FROM THOSE TREES AHEAD !
HIT THE DIRT, MEN !
THEY'VE GOT US GOLD !
RUNDLE, GET THE MORTAR SET UP !
YOU CAN'T CRACK A PILLBOX WITH A MORTAR, CAPTAIN !
I'LL NEED TWO MEN. WE'RE GOING IN CLOSE.
I'LL COME, CAPTAIN.

» Oliver produced a large amount of art for the *War Picture Library* in the early Seventies and also produced art for *Superman The Movie*'s opening credits, as well as numerous other publications.

further. "In 2011 I met Oli and his partner Roger Kean at Replay in Blackpool, and, much to my disbelief and honour, became friends with them in real life. Being shown around their home town by them both was a day I'll never forget."

Wil Overton is another artist who paid Oliver tribute. "I can't deny the impact his art had when I was picking up *Crash* and *Zapp!* each month. He was a proper illustrator of a level I could, and still can, only dream of. Whenever I think of iconic game magazine covers, Oli's work springs to mind."

The final words are best left to Chris Wilkins, a life-long fan of *Crash* growing up, who had developed a friendship with Roger and Oliver and is now the custodian of *Zzap!64*, *Amtix!* and *Crash*. It's thanks to his love for those mags that Oliver's artwork is still enjoyed by many today.

"*Crash* was my go-to magazine each month for reviews and spectacular artwork from Oli on each cover," Chris tells us. "Later in life, I had the pleasure of meeting Oli, and we became good friends. The icing on the cake was getting him to brush off the cobwebs on his airbrush and create brand-new artwork for the *Crash* and *Zzap!64* annuals we released through Fusion Retro Books. I saw Oli the Friday before his passing. I told him about the outpouring of love from all the people he had touched with his art. I thanked him from them and myself and my family. Oli, at that point, was in a coma – the carers told me, though, that he could hear what I was saying. Oli and Roger, over the years, became family – most certainly my second dads. Thanks for everything Oli. You will be sorely missed."

Our thoughts go out to all of Oliver's friends and family.

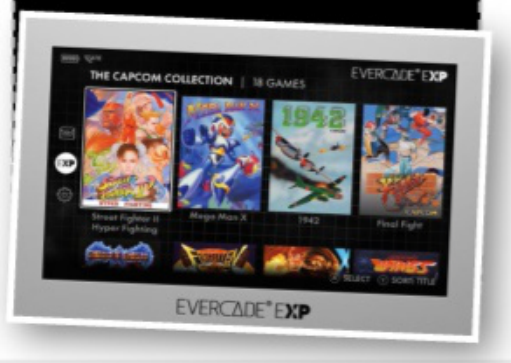
The fantastic art shown here can be found at oliverfreyart.com

CHRISTMAS ANNUALS GALORE

Fans of *Crash*, *Zzap!64* and *Amtix! CPC* will be delighted to hear that new Christmas annuals are being planned by Fusion Retro Books and are on Kickstarter right now. Not only that, the trilogy of retro reads will be joined by *Zzap! Amiga*, *Fusion* and *Toy-Polloi*, ensuring that there's plenty to enjoy over the festive holidays. You can get more information about the books and back the Kickstarter by visiting bit.ly/retroannuals

EVERCADE NETS CAPCOM

Capcom is the latest developer to join the Evercade family, but there's a slight catch. Unlike previous collaborations that have all appeared on physical carts, the 18 games will be built-in to the incoming Evercade EXP and won't be available on the original Evercade or Evercade VS. It's proven a little divisive as existing owners are missing out, but hopefully it's an issue Blaze can solve. You can expect more news on the system in our next issue.



Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

When I'm C64

I always felt sorry for the Commodore 64. In my world, it was either the Spectrum or the BBC. I cannot remember a single friend of mine owning a C64. I knew a couple that had VIC-20s but I don't want to start a war here, so, let's just agree to never mention those again.

Computers that looked like the C64 would pop up on TV and films, giving them an air of cool. *The Whizz Kids* was one of my fave shows as a kid and was almost definitely the forgotten inspiration for *Stranger Things*. A group of kids, led by a geek (he wore glasses and had an acoustic coupler) would solve crimes by hacking the Pentagon and the other three people that had the internet in 1983. I don't think the computer used on there actually was a Commodore 64, but it looked like it. It was the computing equivalent of an Elvis impersonator – wasn't quite right but it'll do.

Apart from the odd bash on them in Boots on a Saturday morning, I didn't get to properly play on a C64 until 1996. I'd finished college, was living with a couple of mates and we had absolutely no way of affording a PlayStation. I was a big fan of car boot sales (an addiction I am doing my very best to overcome right now) and would always come back with some utter junk I didn't need or, thinking about it, even want.

My best haul ever by a country mile was the Commodore 64 I got for a tenner. It came with a huge bag of cassettes, easily 50 in there. When I got back to the flat, everything else was cancelled for the day. Sure it was a million years old, but all three of us completely lost ourselves in the games. Some were obviously utter pony (*The A-Team*? Really? That's the best you could do? I ain't playing no *A-Team* game fool!) but some were absolutely incredible.

The game that totally grabbed us was *IO*. I just looked it up online to make sure I had the title right and I just discovered *IO* stands for 'Into Oblivion'. That's pretty apt as it dragged our days into oblivion. It's no exaggeration to say we did not stop playing *IO* for the next six months. Every waking hour was spent waggling the joystick. But there was no rest at bedtime. When our eyes were closed, we could all see that little ship dodging bullets. The images were burnt onto our retina.

One day though, we'd all had enough. No one fancied it any more. The Commodore lay about for a bit longer but pretty soon got taken to a charity shop. Just like that. Weird, huh?

> "Every waking hour was spent waggling the joystick"

I'll always have fond memories of the C64. Sure, I was ten or so years behind the curve, but it kept me company at a huge transitional point in my life. That weird bit after college when I knew what I wanted to be (an actor) but had zero idea how to get there. Playing *IO* bought me a fair bit of time to work out my master plan.

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Confession time

My name is Paul and I'm an addict. Relax. It's not what you think. I'm addicted to a game, and it has taken over my life. The game is called *Sp!ng* (yes, I know; why can't they call it something normal?), and it's available on the Apple Arcade. It's a simple game, not particularly flashy. Across a series of 2D screens, players control an icon that can latch onto hooks and swing from one to another, while avoiding obstacles. It feels properly seat-of-the-pants, but the euphoria when I complete a series of swings is like nothing else. I play it when I wake up, I play it when I'm meant to be working, and I play it before I go to bed. It's a sickness.

I wanted to give it a shout-out, because its unassuming presentation might mean it gets overlooked. It got me thinking about other overlooked games which I rank among my favourites. The SNES in particular has so many all-time great games that there were many that simply became overshadowed.

Take 1995's *Uniracers* (or *Unirally* here in the UK, for some reason). Frankly, it isn't a particularly attractive game. It featured players racing unicycles around straw-thin 2D tracks, and the combination of side-on perspective and lack of personality in the vehicles did little to sell its appeal. It was released into a market dominated by the likes of *Donkey Kong Country*, *Yoshi's Island*, and the looming arrival of the N64. It also didn't help that developer DMA Design was hit with a lawsuit from Pixar, (its short film, *Red's Dream* stars a red computerised unicycle), and lost. This meant there was little in the way of continued promotion, and certainly no sequels. Nintendo stopped production, capping its sales after the initial run of carts.

While it lasted, I loved *Unirally* nee *Racers*. It was fast paced and featured a smooth learning curve. Gradually, you'd learn to pull off the sort of stunts that'd make Tony Hawk climb into a grave and roll around.

Released the previous year by Kemco, *Kid Klown In Crazy Chase* had the misfortune of being completely original. It's always a gamble to present people with something new, and *Kid Klown* tried that, receiving a mixed reaction, to say the least.

It was one of the first endless-runner games, presented in an isometric perspective as the titular klown chased the fuse of a bomb. It welded some absolutely gorgeous platform aesthetics to its gameplay, looking and playing like a cartoon. Despite lacklustre sales, Kemco was confident enough in the concept to attempt a Game Boy Advance port, and it got a 1996, Japan-only, sequel on the PlayStation. Away from the pixels of the SNES, it lost its charm, and *Kid Klown* was never heard from again. I urge you to seek it out.

Lastly, I recommend *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures*, a 1994 romp through all three of the archaeologist's movies up to that point. Developed by LucasArts in conjunction with Factor 5, it has a lot in common with the Star Wars games, while dialling back somewhat on the murderous difficulty of that trilogy. Yes, the whip-wielding action wasn't a million miles from *Castlevania*, but I'd rank it second to *Fate Of Atlantis* as the best *Indiana Jones* game. Cracking, you might say. *

> "I'd rank it second to Fate Of Atlantis as the best Indiana Jones game"

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LOVE
I made hotcakes, would you like to eat it?
You seem to be in a good mood.
I'm happy to be with you. What about you, Kent?
What would you like to do?

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Ken and Roberta Williams

Sierra On-Line's founders discuss their new game Colossal Cave

If you're a fan of classic adventure games, you'll doubtless know the pioneering works of Ken and Roberta Williams – *Mystery House*, the *King's Quest* series, *Laura Bow*, *Phantasmagoria* and more. They have returned to game development to remake the Seventies classic *Colossal Cave Adventure*, coming later in 2022 to various formats. We spoke to both of them to find out more.

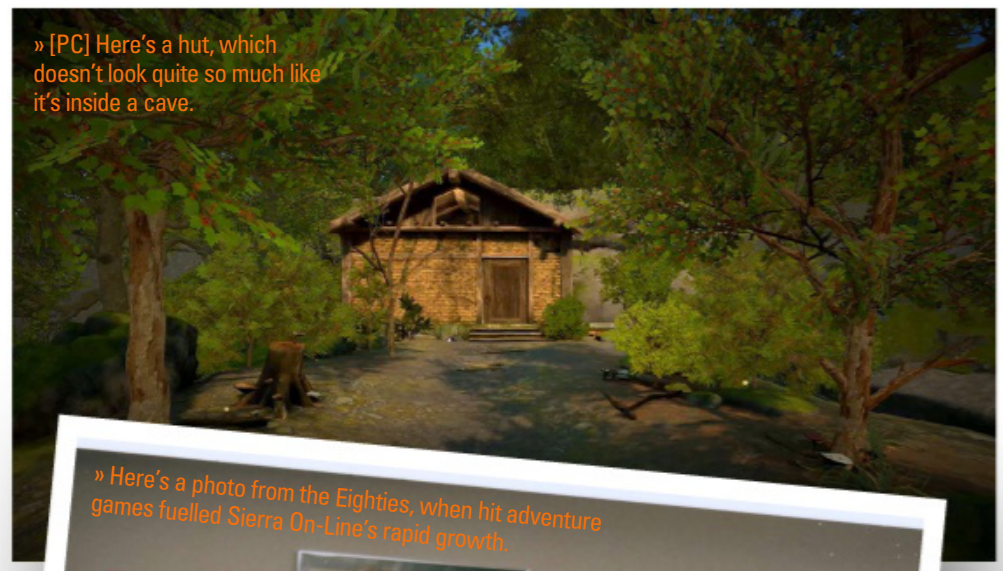
» Ken and Roberta Williams have been a team since the beginning, having married before founding Sierra On-Line.

What was it that brought you back to game development?

Ken: We were happily retired, we had a boat we were taking around the world. We cruised about 60,000 miles, went around the world and visited 27 countries. But then COVID hit, and I was stuck home. So I wrote a book about Sierra, and that got me kind of interested in games again. And then COVID kind of hung in after the book was done, and I just said, "Maybe I should write a game?"

Why remake *Colossal Cave Adventure*?

Ken: That was Berta's idea. The second she said it, it seemed like exactly the right project, because it launched Sierra, and that we kind of owe our life to. We owe a great debt of gratitude to [Will] Crowther and [Don] Woods. Their game has been around for 50



» [PC] Here's a hut, which doesn't look quite so much like it's inside a cave.

» Here's a photo from the Eighties, when hit adventure games fuelled Sierra On-Line's rapid growth.

» [PC] Here are the dwarves that Roberta had to design with only limited descriptions.

years and, you know, it's kind of starting to look long in the tooth. It seemed appropriate to remake it for another 50 years, for the next generation of gamers.

How does it feel to be back in game development?

Roberta: It's hard to describe. Some days, you're really happy and exhilarated, especially when you have a really good day of development and you see new art coming in, new sound effects or something, and you put it together and you go, "Oh, that's so cool." And then [there are] other days, when nothing is going right and there are bugs, and you're trying to figure out what to do. Ken and I are working seven days a week, literally every day. I mean, this is all we're doing. He's on his computer, I'm on mine, and we're talking back and forth. We go to dinner, and all we talk about is the game. It's taken over our lives, literally, and so that part is a little hard to get used to. Because we were kind of retired for quite a long time, and now we're not.

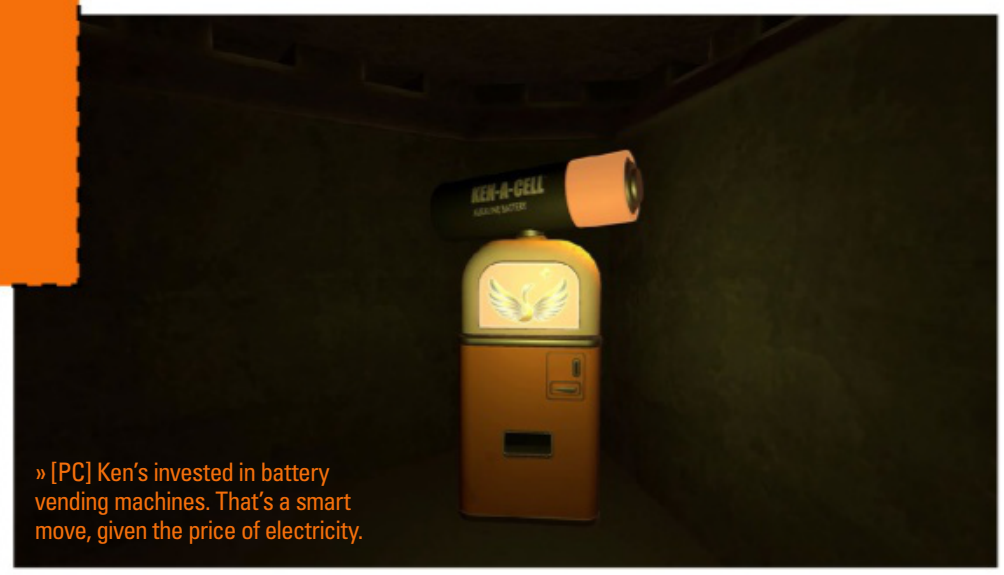
> "Ken and I are working seven days a week"
>
> **ROBERTA WILLIAMS**

How are you approaching the task of turning a text adventure into a first-person 3D adventure?

Roberta: This is the original game – I haven't added any puzzles, any characters, we haven't changed scoring. I've even been using the original messages from the original designers. I've added a lot of messages, but every one of them that they wrote are in the game, and I've only added when I had to because we're using graphics. They tried to explain, when you would go to a new room, where you are and what you were seeing. We tried very carefully to follow their description – sometimes they were beautifully written. Other times, they didn't give me a lot to work with, but I have tried hard to be true to the original. I didn't add any new characters that you interface with, but I still had to design them. So there are dwarves, but they never described them. I have to think, "Well, what does it look like in this game?"

» [PC] Trippy, but we're not fungus fans – we'll stay well away from here in VR.

» [PC] This is the kind of doorway that just beckons you to see what awaits within.



» [PC] Ken's invested in battery vending machines. That's a smart move, given the price of electricity.

Why did you decide to add VR headset support? Did it present any new challenges?

Ken: The truth is that I never liked VR, but we had one artist, Marcus, who loves VR and twisted my arm until I went for it. And to my great surprise, it turned out good. I know the code intimately, but when I fell off the cliff the first time it was scary. And it's different really being there standing in front of the troll and the troll bridge, or having the dragon really blow up. It's just an immersive feeling.

Roberta: [The first time I tried VR], I just felt kind of seasick. I don't get seasick because we're on a boat so much, so actually it was an odd feeling for me. I came up with a way to move in our world with the Meta Quest 2 that is less dizzy and sick inducing, and it's non-standard.

For those players who haven't ever played the original classic text adventure, how would you describe the appeal of *Colossal Cave* to them?

Roberta: I would say to players that have never played it, the original game is a very fun game in and of itself. They may not enjoy it as a text game because it's so old-fashioned, I guess. It'll be a little bit like telling your child, "You could read this *Harry Potter* book or you could watch the movie." As a bookworm, I always prefer the book, and then I might want to see the movie. But that's me, I'm not necessarily normal. But this game, I've got everything that was in the original game, I didn't leave out anything. So there's only additions, but not of gameplay – I didn't mess with any of that, just exploration, the looking and feeling and the immersive quality of it. I think they'll love it.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JANUARY 2006 – With all of the big games having come out in time for Christmas, January's fare looks suspiciously like leftover turkey. Nick Thorpe fires up the time machine to see if the carcass has been picked dry, or if there's still some meat on those bones.

» [PS2] *Shadow Of The Colossus* was clearly written by someone who preferred Goliath to David.

NEWS JANUARY 2006

On 1 January, Russia's state-owned gas company Gazprom cut supplies to Ukraine, following a dispute over pricing. Ukraine had been paying $50 per 1,000 cubic metres of gas, which Gazprom wished to increase to $230. Ukraine's government believed that the price hike was politically motivated, due to the election of pro-European president Viktor Yuschenko. The dispute was resolved by sourcing a cheaper supply mix, but new disputes emerged in the following years.

Israel's prime minister Ariel Sharon suffered from a major stroke on 4 January. He had been due to have heart surgery the next day after having suffered from a minor stroke the previous month. Despite multiple surgeries, he would remain comatose until he passed in 2014 at the age of 85.

Canada's newly formed Conservative Party won its first federal election on 23 January, with new prime minister Stephen Harper leading the nation's smallest ever minority government. The election had been triggered by a corruption scandal within outgoing prime minister Paul Martin's government, and ended 12 years of Liberal rule. Harper would serve as prime minister until the election of Canada's current prime minister.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 2006

Although the Xbox 360 launch frenzy has died down somewhat, *Edge* has some very interesting tales from the front line. According to the magazine, "At many independent retailers, the lucky few who managed to buy 360s were escorted out via the back door with their purchases wrapped in black bin liners." Reports of retailer underhandedness were also present, with *Edge* reporting that, "Many – Game included – were accused of offering desperate customers the hardware they'd preordered only if a bundle of games and peripherals was coupled to it." Chart-Track figures suggested 70,000 sales in three days, just clear of the GameCube but behind the PSP's record. It suggested that Premium packs outsold Core units two to one, though noted that this was "more a reflection of stock shipments than customer choice".

Review sections are looking very thin indeed this month – the *Official Xbox Magazine* has just three games in, with the best score going to Activision's crime sequel *True Crime: New York City*, which got 8.0/10. The magazine felt that the game's "Hollywood production values" and fast subway transport were worth praising, though it noted that the story was "extremely tight and linear". The game divided opinions elsewhere. *NGC* felt that it was "niggly, repetitive and predictable" but "still ambitious and fun", scoring it 70%, while *Play* complained that, "The good cop/bad cop plot device is more or less redundant," and gave it 62%. *Edge* was unimpressed, describing it as a "part-finished, only infrequently entertaining alternative" to *Grand Theft Auto* in a 4/10 review.

The *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* had more reviews to

» [PSP] Why interact with real humans when you can chat up virtual ones inside your PSP?

read, but they ranged from "Utter balls" like *Crazy Frog Racer* (2/10) to mediocrity like *Shrek Superslam* (6/10), which "lasts about as long as Pinocchio's nose in a sawmill". Thankfully, a little action game called *Shadow Of The Colossus* carried the month. According to the magazine, taking down the game's enormous creatures is, "Like a puzzle game – though you learn the rules straight away, the challenge is combining them in new and interesting ways." It praised the way that the bosses act like "real, gigantic animals that get confused, frightened and hurt", and how "every single one makes you feel guilty about killing it". Despite some complaints about the controls and the camera, the game received a 9/10 score.

Disappointment of the month was *50 Cent: Bulletproof*. *Official Xbox Magazine* felt that the shooter's story was told in a way that was "quite amusing and just a little bit funny", but also that it was "boring and old-fashioned to play", scoring it 4.0/10. *Edge* gave it 2/10, noting amusement at the star's G-Unit allies. "A mere touch from their sportswear-clad limbs can send exploding barrels and so-called 'mobile cover' (refuse skips, for example) flying in all manner of directions, mere furniture adopting *Exorcist*-like levels of kinetic rage as the pantomime hoodlums blunder along, guns blazing at factory-line opponents."

GameCube owners, as you've probably come to expect by now, had it rough. The only new exclusive game was *Mario Party 7*, which "seems happy in its rut" according to *NGC*'s 55% review. Over on the PC, there wasn't an awful lot to shout about either. Apart from a belated port of *Psychonauts*, which scored 89%, the highlight of the month was the expansion pack *Battlefield 2: Special Forces*. Though it was "more of a tasty snack than a filling four-course banquet of man-shooting", its improvements to existing character classes and new vehicles made it "a pleasingly different experience to the original", earning it a score of 84%

Handheld owners had a little more to cheer, at least. *Nintendo Touch Golf* for the DS earned 90% in *NGC*, with the reviewer claiming that it has "the most intuitive control system ever" and that this alone "is enough for *Nintendo Touch Golf* to see off *Tiger Woods*". The PSP fared well too thanks to a couple of strong conversions. EA's life simulator *The Sims 2* scored 8/10 in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* for having been "specifically designed to shine in the palm of your hand" and offering plenty of structured goals alongside the traditional freedom of the series. The wrestling sequel *WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2006* also scored 8/10 for having "bridged the gap from PS2 to PSP better than most".

» [DS] *Nintendo Touch Golf* was actually developed by T&E Soft.

Join us next time, when the Christmas hangover will hopefully fade and give way to some more exciting games. ✱

» [PC] Zip wires were just some of the cool new features in *Battlefield 2: Special Forces*.

CHARTS

JANUARY 2006

XBOX 360

1 – Perfect Dark Zero (Microsoft)
2 – Project Gotham Racing 3 (Microsoft)
3 – Call Of Duty 2 (Activision)
4 – Condemned: Criminal Origins (Sega)
5 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Need For Speed: Most Wanted (EA)
2 – WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2006 (THQ)
3 – 50 Cent: Bulletproof (Vivendi)
4 – FIFA 06 (EA)
5 – Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One (Activision)

XBOX

1 – Half-Life 2 (EA)
2 – Star Wars Battlefront II (LucasArts)
3 – The Matrix: Path Of Neo (Atari)
4 – Gun (Activision)
5 – Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami)

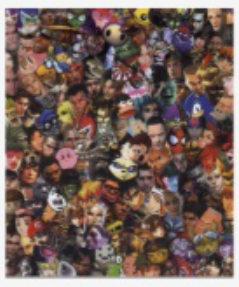
MUSIC

1 – That's My Goal (Shayne Ward)
2 – JCB Song (Nizlopi)
3 – Break The Night With Colour (Richard Ashcroft)
4 – I'll Be Ready (Sunblock)
5 – George Best: A Tribute (Brian Kennedy & Peter Corry)

THIS MONTH IN...

NGC

"*Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, while still set for release on GameCube, will be coming out close to the Revolution's launch date – the reason being that it will be playable on Revolution too." That's apparently around November in the UK.

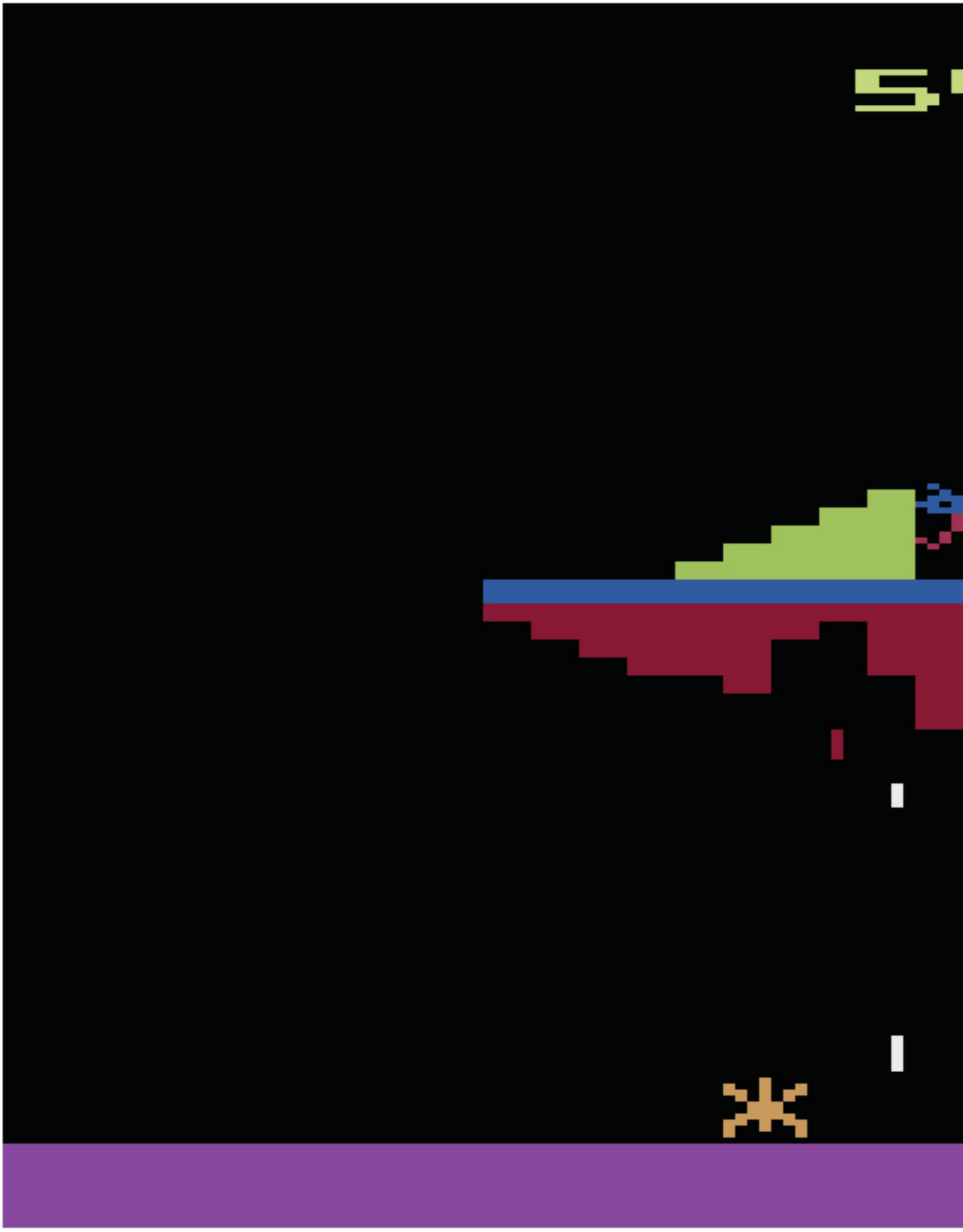


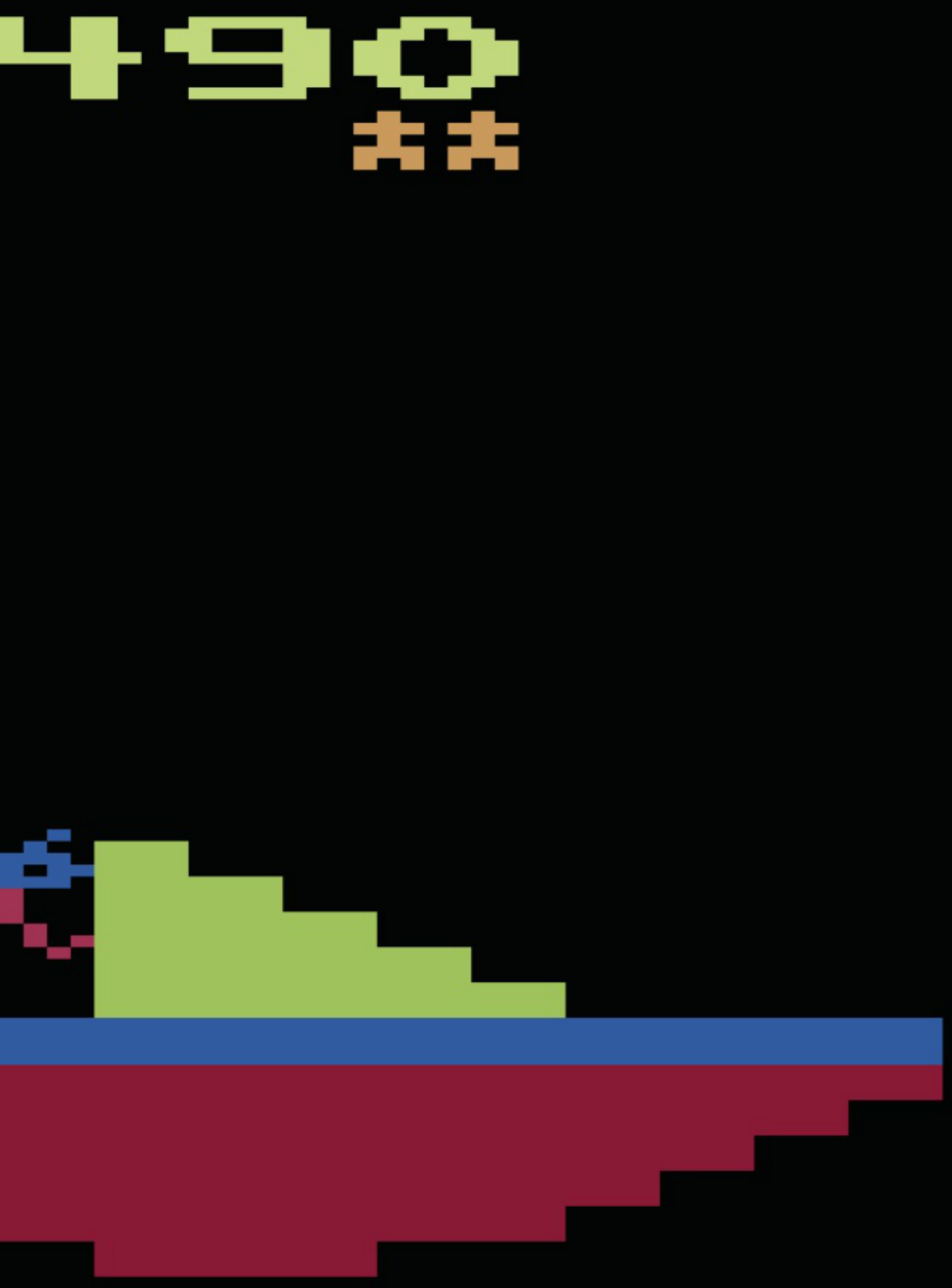
Edge

"Largely overlooked when its first trailer played to E3 crowds, SCEJ's survival horror packs into its perverse CG plenty of child torture." Based on that description, we're pretty sure *Rule Of Rose* won't meet any controversy later on.

Play

Reader George Morrow wants to know why the team hates most films. "You called *Predator 2* 'cheese on a stick' and said that *The Matrix: Reloaded* could have been 'even more banal'. Lay off the producers, they're doing the best they can."





Phoenix

AKA TAKANASHI KIARA'S REVENGE

RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI 2600 » 1982 » ATARI INC

Though I'm not as hardcore a shoot-'em-up fan as Darran is, I do have a soft spot for the genre. Those of you who know me as a Dreamcast fan could probably have guessed that, because anyone that stuck with the machine to the bitter end had to learn to love a bit of blasting. However, my trigger finger was developing long before I started getting hefty import charges in my letterbox, as my dad's Atari 2600 shoot-'em-ups provided some of my formative gaming experiences. *Space Invaders* is iconic and *Centipede* was one of the first games I ever played, but *Phoenix* is the one I most often return to today.

If you've never played the original arcade game or its home version before, it's a pretty simple game. The first two waves consist of slow-moving enemy formations, with individual foes breaking away for close-range attacks much like *Galaxian*'s enemies do. The second two introduce new enemies, birds which move in an erratic fashion, moving up and down and changing directions at seemingly random times. Only a direct hit will do – hit their wings and they'll soon regrow them. Then there's the boss, a heavily shielded UFO which dominates the screen and requires many hits to take down. If you're ever in danger, pulling down on the joystick activates a temporary shield that also freezes you in place.

It's only a couple of years younger than *Space Invaders*, yet *Phoenix* was already considerably advanced by comparison. Its enemies have distinctive behaviours that are harder to predict, there's a boss fight, and although it doesn't have a bomb it does have a desperation option in the shield. All it's really missing from the modern genre template is power-ups and an admittedly large helping of enemy variety, and I find that fascinating. If you're looking for a game that captures the essence of the genre, *Phoenix* is a great option.

40 YEARS OF THE commodore 64

IT HAS BEEN MAKING BEIGE THE NEW BLACK SINCE 1982, SO JOIN US FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE MIGHTY C64 AS WE REVISIT ITS HIGHS AND OCCASIONAL LOWS OVER THE LAST FOUR DECADES

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY AND ANDREW FISHER

Let's get something straight from the start – you could not fit a loaf inside a Commodore 64. Whoever came up with the nickname 'beige bread bin' must have frequented a yeast-free bakery but then the Spectrum's keyboard was not actually made of zombie-flesh either. It's a sign of how both these beloved micros, released in the same year, generated finger-pointing ridicule along with deep and enduring affection, a sure indication of cultural significance.

The C64 was not Commodore's first microcomputer, having launched the PET 2001 in 1977, nor was it the first to make a serious impression on the mass market, with the VIC-20 selling over a million units during its short commercial lifespan. Yet the C64 would be its most lasting legacy (sorry, Amiga fans), holding the Guinness World Record for best-selling single model computer, shifting an estimated 12,500,000 machines. It left behind a wealth of memorable games as well as kick-starting the careers of many programmers on both sides of the Atlantic – and even a few in Japan.

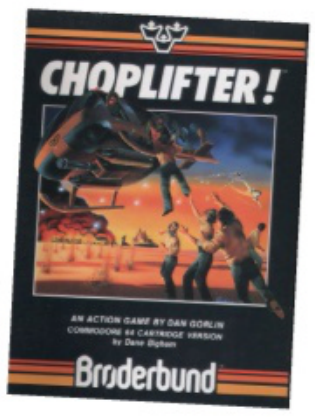
Work on Commodore's successor to the VIC-20 began in 1981, led by the skilled team at MOS Technology, a chip design and manufacturing company acquired by Commodore in 1976. Jack Tramiel, who had founded the company back in 1953, set a tight deadline of January 1982 for the new micro to be ready for its first public viewing at the Consumer Electronics Show that year. During development, the codename of the machine the world would come to know and love as the C64 was the VIC-40, a nod to its superiority over its plucky predecessor, which is rather apt as we now take a tour through 40 years of the beige ciabatta tin. No, we don't think it will catch on either.

» [C64] Polly put the kettle on, the terrible music that accompanied *Radar Rat Race*.

1982

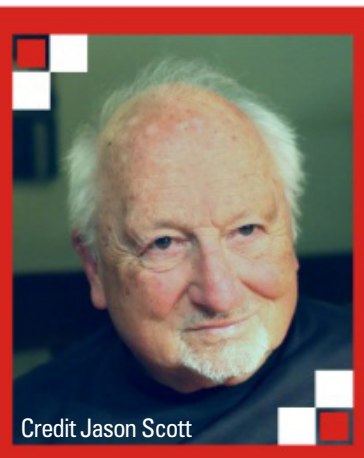
With appetites suitably whetted after its appearance at trade shows at the start of the year, the Commodore 64 went on sale to an eager public in August 1982. The general consensus seems to have been this was a lot of computer power for the very reasonable price of $595 (£399 when it arrived in the UK), with reports that envious Atari executives grumbled at how such a low retail price could have been achieved. The secret was vertical integration: by controlling numerous stages of hardware production, including those all-important custom chips, Commodore was not at the mercy of greedy or unreliable suppliers and could keep component costs low while still maintaining a healthy profit margin. This allowed a dramatic price cut of $200 before the year was out, putting it well below its US competitors, the Apple II and Atari 800, and considerably closer to Sinclair's ZX Spectrum, its main rival in Britain.

Commodore's aggressive pricing strategy proved it meant business and of course the machine was marketed as a powerful tool for small enterprises, offering accounting packages for the aspiring entrepreneur. However, the company's experience with the VIC-20 meant it knew games helped sell computers and its cartridge releases of such arcade staples as *Omega Race*, *Clowns* and *Radar Rat Race* (its clone of Namco's *Rally-X*), were some of the better titles available in the lead up to the machine's first Christmas. Third-party publishers like Sirius and Infocom were early supporters, the latter's releases pushing sales of the 1541 disk drive, which was slow, unreliable, and cost almost as much as the computer itself but facilitated some excellent text adventures. And 1982 would also see the first C64 games from Llamasoft's Jeff Minter, whose career would progress hand in hoof with the machine in the following years.



MOS DEF

■ Jack Tramiel made many canny decisions during his long tenure as head of Commodore but the most profitable was purchasing MOS Technology, a semiconductor design and fabrication company based in Pennsylvania. The acquisition meant Commodore not only got to put the new 6502 microprocessor at the heart of its home computers, it also gained the services of visionary designer Chuck Peddle (pictured in 2013) and Bob Yannes, the genius behind the SID audio chip.


Credit Jason Scott

"ENVIOUS ATARI EXECUTIVES GRUMBLED AT HOW THE C64 COULD BE SOLD AT SUCH A LOW RETAIL PRICE"

DEFINING GAMES

AVENGER

PUBLISHER COMMODORE
DEVELOPER UNKNOWN
HIGHEST SCORE 4/5 (COMMODORE USER)

■ Back in the Seventies and early Eighties, the first year of any new machine's life was usually dependent on first-party software. Commodore had a track record of producing decent arcade conversions for the VIC-20 and having a solid *Space Invaders* clone still mattered in 1982. Which this was.

DEADLINE

PUBLISHER INFOCOM
DEVELOPER MARC BLANK
HIGHEST SCORE 93% (ZZAP!64)

■ Though largely a forgotten genre today, it's hard to underestimate how important text adventures were to early home computing. Infocom produced some marvellous titles for the C64, including this intriguing murder mystery, which pioneered the inclusion of physical clues in the game box.

FORT APOCALYPSE

PUBLISHER SYNAPSE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER JOE VIERRA
HIGHEST SCORE 5/5 (HOME COMPUTING WEEKLY)

■ *Choplifter* was great but we prefer our helicopter action to be claustrophobic and brutal. Entering the underground base and tackling its many obstacles and enemies was a supremely tense experience, requiring patience and forethought as well as firepower.

AXIS ASSASSIN

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: JOHN FIELD
HIGHEST SCORE 70% (ZZAP!64)

■ The missing link between *Tempest* and *Beamrider*, this web-based shooter has you blasting creepy crawlies, clearing out the cobwebs and taking on the big mother spider across a series of increasingly challenging levels. Kudos if you can beat the invisible webs.

NIGHT MISSION PINBALL

PUBLISHER: SUBLOGIC
DEVELOPER: BRUCE A ARTWICK
HIGHEST SCORE 83% (TILT)

■ Videogame versions of pinball had been around for many years, but this cleverly designed table was a considerable step forward, offering believable ball physics, a tilt mechanic and the option to tweak various aspects of the game. Fast and flippin' good.

» [C64] More of Paul Norman's atmospheric music and cinematic gameplay in *Aztec Challenge*.

"THIS WAS ALSO THE YEAR THAT THE C64 ARRIVED ON BRITISH SHORES IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS"

» [C64] The superb *Spy Hunter* conversion, with *Peter Gunn* theme music, was an early success.

1983

By the end of 1983, three million C64s had been sold worldwide and the machine was firmly established as a desirable computer for gamers and a format worth backing for software developers. Commodore's continued price-cutting and bold marketing certainly helped but external factors also played a role. The infamous US-based 'videogame crash' which severely affected the arcade and console markets, humbling the once mighty Atari and shaking confidence in the very future of the medium, left home computers largely unscathed. Those punters who might have previously upgraded to a new machine from Atari or Intellivision could see the advantage of opting for a micro instead and companies such as Activision, built on producing third-party titles for consoles, also moved into making games for computers. Innovative titles by David Crane, Mark Turmell and the Kitchen brothers would soon be gracing the C64.

This was also the year that the C64 arrived on British shores in significant numbers. The Spectrum had a considerable head start, both in terms of computers sold and number of games available, and it is noticeable that many of the best releases for the C64 in 1983 originated from the US. Credit, then, to UK developers such as the aforementioned Llamasoft, Alligata and the Bridlington-based Taskset for flying the flag with some fine homegrown titles.

The growing user base for Commodore machines (remember, the VIC-20 was still doing brisk business) led to the launch of a dedicated magazine, entitled, appropriately enough, *Commodore User*. A pilot issue was produced for the International Commodore Computer Show in June with the official first issue appearing on newsstands in October. The magazine was a wonderful smorgasbord of ideas and features, with articles on learning machine code and technical tips for creating better sprites sat next to advice on purchasing a printer, reviews of the latest software releases and plenty of game listings to type in. And adverts. So many adverts. As the years went by, the magazine would focus primarily on commercial games, as clearly shown by the changing style of cover images, but those early issues are a pertinent reminder that the Commodore 64 was a computer, not just a games machine. You could be a maker as well as a player, you could tinker with it, get creative and explore its, and your own, potential. Heady days indeed.

DEFINING GAMES

BEACH-HEAD

PUBLISHER: ACCESS SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: BRUCE & ROGER CARVER
HIGHEST SCORE 9/10 (CVG)

World War II has long provided subject matter for videogames and this four-stage assault on the enemy, fighting on land, sea and in the air, offers a tense and varied conflict. Finally blowing up the big gun was supremely satisfying.

BLUE MAX

PUBLISHER: SYNAPSE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: PETER C ADAMS
HIGHEST SCORE 5/5 (YOUR COMMODORE)

Fly your biplane over hostile territory, bomb enemy encampments, machine gun opposing pilots and earn the coveted Blue Max medal awarded to brave German pilots while listening to *Rule Britannia*. No, we don't know what side we were supposed to be on either.

FORBIDDEN FOREST

PUBLISHER: COSMI
DEVELOPER: PAUL NORMAN
HIGHEST SCORE 9/10 (PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES)

If you go down in the woods today, you're sure of a big surprise… like being crushed by a giant frog or speared by a skeleton. Hugely atmospheric and pretty gory for its day, we still smile at the bold bowman's victory dance.

INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

PUBLISHER: COMMODORE
DEVELOPER: ANDREW SPENCER
HIGHEST SCORE 10/10 (CVG)

A landmark title in the history of videogame adaptations of the beautiful game, this offered an accessible and entertaining kickabout, even if the goalies mainly performed ineffective belly flops and you could juggle the ball on your head halfway down the pitch.

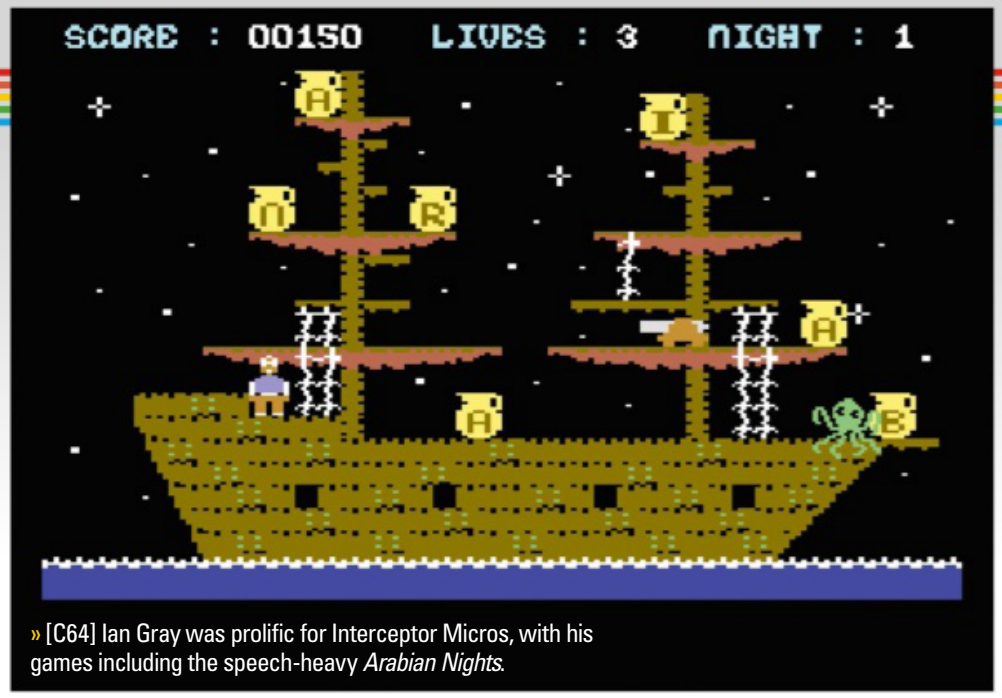
JAMMIN'

PUBLISHER: TASKSET
DEVELOPER: TONY GIBSON
HIGHEST SCORE 5/5 (CVG)

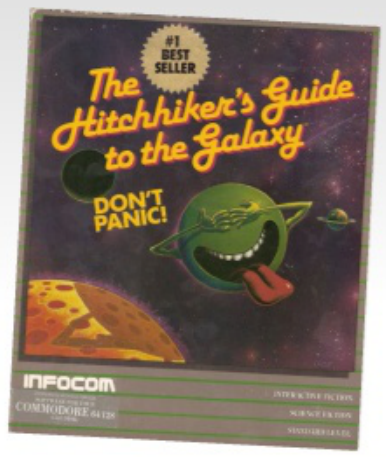
"Colour your dream red, gold and green," urged programmer Tony 'Gibbo' Gibson in this highly original action-based puzzler which had you hopping on conveyor belts, collecting instruments and dodging musical thieves, all to a banging, dynamic soundtrack.

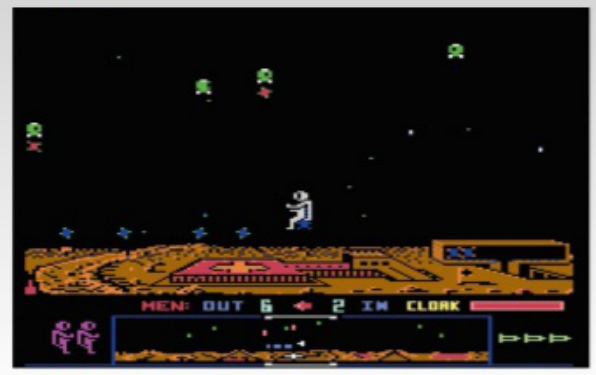
HAVE SX-64, WILL TRAVEL

With 'business' literally being the company's middle name, it's no surprise that Commodore was a pioneer in the portable-computer market. The SX-64, announced this year though not released until 1984, looked like a sturdy briefcase and came with a built-in disk drive and a 5-inch monitor. Retailing at almost $1,000, it didn't sell well but is highly collectable now – just don't use it as a laptop, as it's likely to cut off circulation to your legs.



» [C64] Ian Gray was prolific for Interceptor Micros, with his games including the speech-heavy *Arabian Nights*.





"A COMMODORE SPOKESMAN PREDICTED ITS COMPUNET SERVICE WOULD ATTRACT 1,000 SUBSCRIBERS IN ITS FIRST MONTH"

1984

Apple may have tried to claim 1984 as its own in an Orwellian-inspired ad campaign but for C64 owners, this would be the year their beige beauty really began to shine, not something normally associated with that colour. Only a few years before, gamers would be satisfied with single-screen arcade clones but now titles like the politically inflammatory *Raid Over Moscow* and the brilliant *Bruce Lee* offered action across multiple stages. *Quo Vadis*, written by Steven Chapman and published by The Edge (the software house, not the guitarist), boasted an expansive game world a thousand screens big, with a gold sceptre worth £10,000 on offer to the first adventurer to successfully solve the puzzles scattered through the vast cavern system. The prize remains unclaimed to this day.

Though the size and quality of games was increasing exponentially, game development was still measured in months rather than years, which meant many talented coders were becoming 'names' in the C64 scene. Along with Jeff Minter and his fluffy ungulates, the prolific Tony Crowther became a familiar face in computer magazines with such hits as *Loco* and *Monty Mole*, while Ian Gray at Interceptor Micros produced a string of weird and hard-as-nails titles. Archer Maclean also announced his arrival as a programmer of note with the excellent *Dropzone* but perhaps the most recognisable name was that of Eugene Evans, the original 'whizzkid coder', whose *Psyclapse*, along with the Spectrum's *Bandersnatch*, was lost in the dramatic collapse of Imagine Software.

The cover of *Popular Computing Weekly* in late-August declared Commodore's 'own networking system,' Compunet, was all set for a public launch on 19 September, allowing modem owners to download software, communicate with fellow users, indulge in 'teleshopping', and even manage their bank account. A Commodore spokesman predicted the service would attract 1,000 subscribers in its first month, though we aren't sure this kind of thing will ever really catch on. The company would also launch two new home computers, the C16 and Plus/4, each aimed at different ends of the market, making this an especially eventful year for Commodore, which had begun with founder Jack Tramiel leaving the company in a huff and taking over Atari, triggering a whole new rivalry. There would be blood…

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

■ Glance at the defining games of this year and you'll notice – they talk. From *Impossible Mission*'s goading 'Stay a while… stay forever!' and singing along with *Ghostbusters* (pictured), to customers hailing their space taxi, speech was becoming a familiar feature. Users could also have fun experimenting with speech synthesis packages such as SAM and Magic Voice, which usually involved making your computer swear. We made our own entertainment back then.

DEFINING GAMES

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

PUBLISHER: EPYX/US GOLD
DEVELOPER: DENNIS CASWELL
HIGHEST SCORE 95% (ZZAP!64)

■ Look how he leaps! We'd played platformers before, but few were this graceful or offered such an intriguing challenge, as you explored the many rooms of Elvin Atombender's underground lair, avoiding his army of killer robots and piecing together punch cards.

BOULDER DASH

PUBLISHER: FIRST STAR SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: PETER LIEPA & CHRIS GRAY
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (ZZAP!64)

■ Rockford, the cute hero of this ingenious puzzle game, would become something of a mascot for the C64, often appearing in the pages, or more accurately, the margins, of *Zzap!64* magazine, a just reward for starring in such a brilliant title.

BRUCE LEE

PUBLISHER: DATASOFT
DEVELOPER: RON J FORTIER
HIGHEST SCORE 92% (ZZAP!64)

■ Of course you wanted to play as the martial arts legend, unleashing flying kicks on the sorry head of that relentless ninja, but let's hear it for the rotund warrior, Green Yamo, who could opt to help or hinder Bruce – or both.

SPACE TAXI

PUBLISHER: MUSE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: JOHN F KUTCHER
HIGHEST SCORE A (COMPUTER GAMES MAGAZINE)

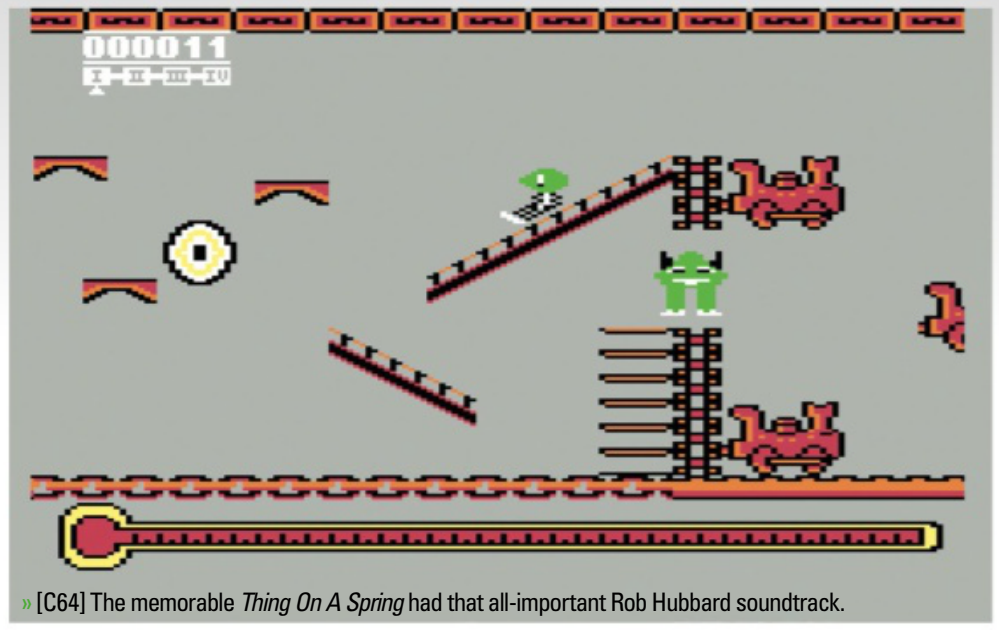
■ "Hey, taxi!" bellows a customer and off you speed to collect your fare and deliver him to his destination in double-quick time. Wildly imaginative level design and crammed with interesting game mechanics, this is Jeff Minter's favourite C64 game. This leads us nicely on to…

SHEEP IN SPACE

PUBLISHER LLAMASOFT
DEVELOPER JEFF MINTER
HIGHEST SCORE 8/10 (PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES)

■ 1984 was a vintage year for Llamasoft, with both *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* and *Ancipital* securing the company's standing with C64 gamers, but surely you knew we'd pick Jeff's glorious take on *Defender* as our game of this or any other year?

"WOULD THE LAUNCH OF THE AMIGA MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR THE C64?"



» [C64] The memorable *Thing On A Spring* had that all-important Rob Hubbard soundtrack.

1985

If you love the smell of new hardware in the morning, 1985 was a good time to be alive. As well as Nintendo releasing the NES in America and Sega's Master System launching in Japan, Commodore released the C128. The new machine boasted backwards compatibility with the C64, more RAM, an 80-column display and a Z80 processor (for CP/M business software) alongside the speedier 8502, all of which may have impressed business users but game developers never really embraced it, with a limited number of releases taking full advantage of its higher spec.

Besides, the real battle was in the brave new world of the 16-bit machines, with Atari, under the direction of a belligerent Jack Tramiel, releasing the ST (the letters stood for Sixteen/Thirty-Two, a reminder of its increased processing power). Commodore replied with the Amiga 1000 and for the rest of the decade and beyond, the pair would go head-to-head on the battlefields of improved hardware, price, software exclusives and fanboy devotion.

So where did this leave the C64 and its mere 8-bits? In rude health, it turned out. The year saw many impressive sequels to popular releases, a sure sign the market was maturing, with *Beach-Head II*, *Spy Vs Spy II* and *Beyond The Forbidden Forest* all building on solid foundations. There were notable forays into the third dimension with *Mercenary*, *Rescue On Fractalus! and The Eidolon*. Releases such as *Ballblazer*, *Kikstart*, *Rocket Ball* and *Winter Games* also gave reason to thank whoever insisted the C64 should have two joystick ports, as playing them in company was so much more fun.

Publishing houses like Ocean Software and Firebird were getting into their stride, bolstering the C64 market with big name conversions and licensed titles and Mastertronic gave us *Chiller*, proving you could buy a decent game for under two quid. The future may have been uncertain – would the launch of the Amiga mark the beginning of the end for the C64 in the same way its own arrival had triggered the demise of the VIC-20? – but the present was proving absolutely glorious.

DEFINING GAMES

PARADROID

PUBLISHER HEWSON CONSULTANTS
DEVELOPER ANDREW BRAYBROOK (GRAFTGOLD)
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

From the minimalistic cool of the visuals to the frantic but tactical droid-capturing subgame, this epic tale of rebellious robots invariably appears near the top of those 'best C64 games ever' lists. And rightly so.

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER DENTON DESIGNS
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

If you ever wanted evidence that they don't make them like they used to, relax and revisit this surreal mishmash of ideas and game styles, which manages to be absolutely of its time yet strangely prescient.

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER DAVID CRANE
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

Another game concept that clearly had legs (very little legs, in this case), David Crane foresaw both the Tamagotchi craze and *The Sims*, with this charming virtual pet package. We have fond memories of playing cards with our Brian. Until his untimely death.

SUPER PIPELINE 2

PUBLISHER TASKSET
DEVELOPER TASKSET
HIGHEST SCORE 88% (ZZAP!64)

It began as an unreleased arcade title and the original game looked impressive on release in 1983, but this sequel gets everything right, from the increasingly intricate pipe systems to the horrible necessity of sacrificing your loyal workmen for the greater good.

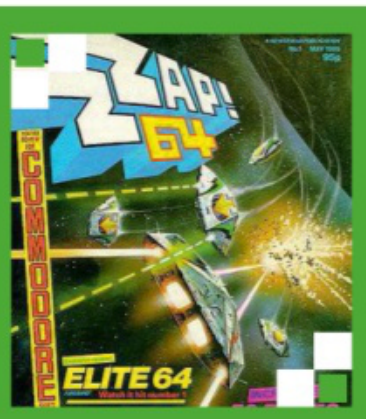
THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

PUBLISHER MELBOURNE HOUSE
DEVELOPER GREGG BARNETT
HIGHEST SCORE 93% (ZZAP!64)

International Karate and especially its sequel, *IK+*, were great fighting games but right from the nerve-shredding scream on the title screen, this oozes class. We can still feel the exquisite pain of a well-timed kick to the groin.

IT'S A SIZZLER!

Zzap!64 crashed (geddit?) onto the scene in April, with a striking *Elite* cover by the late Oli Frey, and quickly became an essential part of any respectable Commodore gamer's month – and continues to be, since its phoenix-like return in recent years. Writers such as Gary Penn and Julian Rignall became your clued-up best mates, telling you what to buy and what to avoid with a simple tip of their thumbs.



» [C64] *BMX Simulator* was a key launch title for Codemasters new budget label.

1986

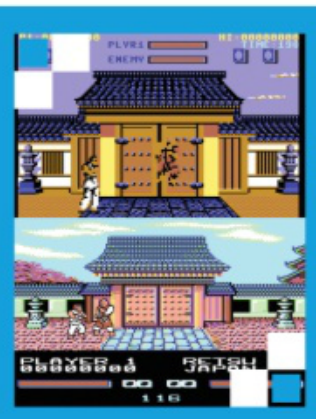
Thomas Rattigan had replaced Marshall Smith as CEO of Commodore, cutting costs and even proposing that Apple take over the Amiga at one point. The big change this year was the introduction of the C64C, the cost-reduced version of the C64. This had a new, sleeker wedge-shaped case in a similar style to the C128. MOS had changed its manufacturing processes, allowing the chips to be made cheaper and increasing Commodore's profit margin on every sale – even at the low US retail price of $150. The newer SID chip – the 8580 – sounded different to the users. Going back to the original specifications eliminated background 'noise' from the chip. This resulted in sampled sounds playing quietly on the new model, disappointing fans. There were also variations in the filter, and Commodore removed the information on the advanced SID features (ring modulation and synchronisation) from the user's guide. The slimmer 1541-II disk drive matched the C64C, with an external power pack.

Commodore updated the C128, with the new D model being like the Amiga 1000 and PCs; the base unit contained a built-in 1571 disk drive, with a separate keyboard. But it did not result in extra 128K-only games. There was also the Goldene Edition from Commodore Germany; a limited edition (of roughly 100) plaques containing an older C64 spray-painted gold. There have been fakes sold online, but the real gold machines are very collectable.

This year saw major changes at *Zzap!64* after the editor of CCI Anthony Jacobsen had criticised it as being a "fluffy, lollipop rag" aimed at children. Roger Kean stepped down as editor with Gary Penn taking over, while Gary Liddon left to take charge of Thalamus. This new software house was funded by Newsfield but independent from the magazines, in response to fans saying it would be a good idea since the reviewers knew all about games. A backlash from rival publisher EMAP and its magazines was hypocritical since it already had its own software company (Beyond, although that label would shortly be taken over by British Telecom/Firebird). Oh, and Alan Sugar's Amstrad bought out Sinclair leading to the new +2 machine; that was heavily delayed by technical issues, continuing the run of Sinclair problems surrounding release dates. But let's not gloat.

AMERICA VS EUROPE

■ A clear difference in design philosophy emerged between the US and Europe. American games were frequently designed to load extra sections from disk. Most British users were still loading from cassette, meaning either cramming the game into a single load or relying on multiload. An example – *Street Fighter* had separate games developed by Tiertex (UK, large sprites) and Capcom USA (small overlaid sprites) that took different approaches.

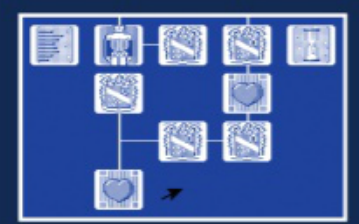


» [C64] David Fox's work on the movie tie-in *Labyrinth* would set the scene for Lucasfilm's *Maniac Mansion*.

"THE BIG CHANGE THIS YEAR WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF THE C64C, THE COST-REDUCED VERSION OF THE C64"

DEFINING GAMES

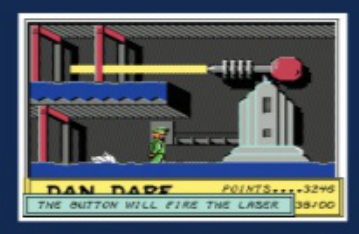
ALTER EGO



PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER PETER J FAVARO PHD
HIGHEST SCORE 98% (ZZAP!64)

■ Developed by a psychologist, this stylish and unique icon-driven game spread across multiple disks and asked you to make choices in difficult scenarios as your character aged. There were also separate male and female versions with different outcomes.

DAN DARE: PILOT OF THE FUTURE



PUBLISHER VIRGIN GAMES
DEVELOPER GANG OF FIVE (ANDY WILSON)
HIGHEST SCORE 94% (ZZAP!64)

■ The first of three games based on the classic British comic character, the inventive use of speech bubbles and joystick-based commands gave it a great atmosphere.

LEADERBOARD

PUBLISHER ACCESS SOFTWARE/US GOLD
DEVELOPER BRUCE & ROGER CARVER
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

■ The start of a groundbreaking series and foundation for the later PC titles known as *Links*. From the rotoscoped animation of the golfer's swing to the challenging course design, this is a truly classic golf game.

PSI 5 TRADING COMPANY

PUBLISHER US GOLD
DEVELOPER ACCOLADE
HIGHEST SCORE 9/10 (YOUR COMMODORE)

■ Part of Accolade's brilliant series of games featuring outstanding high-resolution animation. You pick your starship crew (all with different personalities) and try to reach your destination. As enemies attack, your ship accumulates damage and pirates loot your precious cargo.

TRAILBLAZER

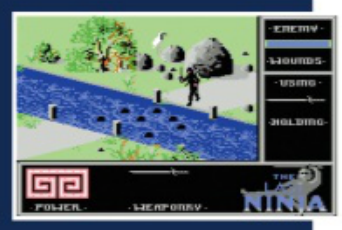
PUBLISHER GREMLIN GRAPHICS
DEVELOPER SHAUN SOUTHERN & ANDREW MORRIS
HIGHEST SCORE 93% (ZZAP!64)

■ Originally made for the C16, the C64 version of this racing game added a split-screen two-player mode. The coloured tiles affect your ball in different ways as you race to the finish line. The sequel *Cosmic Causeway* was also technically impressive.

"SIGNIFICANTLY, THE 8-BIT CONSOLES WERE NOW ARRIVING ON UK SHORES"

DEFINING GAMES

THE LAST NINJA



PUBLISHER SYSTEM 3
DEVELOPER JOHN TWIDDY
HIGHEST SCORE 94% (ZZAP!64)

Based on an idea by Mark Cale and advertised for months, superb isometric graphics from Hugh Riley portray six Asian-themed levels backed by amazing music from Ben Daglish and Anthony Lees. The tricky jumping sections have aged badly, however.

WIZBALL

PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (ZZAP!64)

Mix colours and blast enemies in this surreal mixture of shoot-'em-up and platform game. This is Sensible Software at its most inventive, with a superb soundtrack from Martin Galway. It remains one of the greatest C64 games ever.

BUGGY BOY

PUBLISHER ELITE SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER DAVE & BOB THOMAS
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

Rather than recreate the huge graphics of the arcade game, Dave and Bob went for a smaller buggy and kept up the pace. Obstacles hinder you as you race to complete five courses and collect bonus flags in this superb racer.

SKATE OR DIE

PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER MICHAEL KOSAKA, STEPHEN LANDRUM & DAVID BUNCH
HIGHEST SCORE 92% (ZZAP!64)

Former Epyx developers moved to Electronic Arts and unleashed a corking multi-event game based around skateboarding. From half-pipe to downhill races and the gnarly pool jam, a highlight was undoubtedly Rob Hubbard's sampled guitar in the sublime title music.

DRILLER

PUBLISHER INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER CHRIS ANDREW
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (ZZAP!64)

After starting on the Amstrad, the Freescape engine promised filled 3D graphics on an 8-bit machine. While movement was slow, the atmosphere generated by Matt Gray's music and the huge structures of Mitral made this a deep and absorbing game.

YOUR MEN FLEE IN PANIC AS THE TIDE OF BATTLE TURNS AGAINST THEM. YOU BRAVELY FIGHT ON AND ARE WOUNDED. YOU ARE IMPRISONED IN ST.KITTS. MONTHS PASS AS YOU AWAIT YOUR FATE.

» [C64] Sid Meier's *Pirates* saw you sailing the Caribbean in a classic based on historical research.

1987

In a lengthy, downbeat editorial for *Zzap!64* issue 23, Gary Penn bemoaned the lack of originality in software. He talked about clones and games that put presentation above gameplay. "Unfortunately, software houses will continue to release repackaged versions of the same old thing, if that is what the customers appear to want. Is this really what YOU want – or is it all you can get?" The next few months proved there was still originality in the industry, with some of the most beloved C64 games ever being released. There were brilliant arcade conversions (including the amazing *Bubble Bobble* developed by Software Creations for Firebird) and innovative ideas (such as Lucasfilm Games' *Maniac Mansion* and the rotating towers of *Nebulus*, as well as the stunning conversion of Ocean's isometric classic *Head Over Heels*).

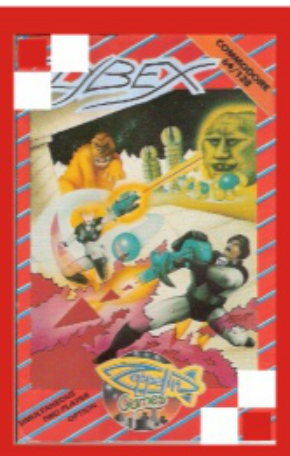
Although Thomas Rattigan's cost-cutting had turned around Commodore's fortunes, chairman Irving Gould ousted him in April and took over as CEO. Commodore was still releasing new machines, with the Amiga 500 entering the fray and becoming a bestseller against Atari's ST – but the C64 continued to sell. German fans could even go to Aldi and buy a new revision of the hardware. This had an off-white breadbin-style case and the cost-reduced motherboard from the C64C.

Significantly, the 8-bit consoles were now arriving on UK shores. Toy company Mattel was distributing the Nintendo Entertainment System, while Mastertronic took the rights to Sega's Master System; the latter sold faster until Nintendo established its own European branch. Mastertronic also tried to launch the Arcadia arcade hardware (based on Amiga hardware to reduce the development costs for home conversions), with familiar games including *Xenon* and other titles based on its own budget games. Arcadia's expensive failure – with poor games such as *Aaargh!*, *Rockford* and *Roadwars* that also had disappointing C64 versions – saw Virgin take over Mastertronic.

In America, Creative Micro Designs (often known by its initials CMD) was formed to sell hardware to C64 users. Its popular JiffyDOS chips were the main initial product, giving faster disk access. In later years it would import European software to the States.

BUDGET GAMES LEVEL UP

Mastertronic was the pioneer of the budget game, placing racks in newsagents and other shops to attract casual buyers with cheap impulse buys at just £1.99. Its MAD (Mastertronic Added Dimension) label upped the price to £2.99. Firebird had its Silverbird range, while the Darling brothers had started Codemasters in 1986 after contributing many games to Mastertronic. Zeppelin arrived with original games including *Zybex* and *Bionic Ninja*, Alternative and Atlantis also entered the market. Budget re-releases of older games would become important.



» [C64] *The Great Giana Sisters* proved controversial, being withdrawn from sale and becoming a collector's item.

1988

Commodore once again made producing the C64 cheaper with the CR model. This had plastic clips instead of screws holding the case together, and the newer 'short board' version of the main motherboard. In Germany, the equivalent C64G was in the grey/white case first seen with the Aldi edition. There are variations of the C64G, either with the original C64's brown keys or the later C64C grey/white keys. The C128 underwent its final revision, becoming the C128DCR (CR for 'Cost-Reduced', using a metal case to reduce radio interference). Rumours also emerged of a new machine, initially referred to as the 64DX. Bridging the gap between the Amiga and C64, the VIC-III chip (codenamed Bill after engineer Bill Gardei) gave higher resolutions and more colours. The DX would also have a built-in 3.5-inch drive. The company also launched a range of business PCs, but it was never a major player in that field.

Compilations had become good business for the software houses, gathering old games and getting more sales. Beau Jolly – named after the annual rush to get Beaujolais Nouveau wine into British restaurants – had specialised in this area for some time, from the *10 Computer Hits* series that was advertised on TV to the newer *Five Star Hits* series. But two compilations from big-name companies stole the headlines this year. US Gold's *History In The Making* offered an amazing 15 titles. Famous games from Access, Datasoft and Epyx looked back to previous years but contained so much top-level gameplay. It also marked a turning point for the company, moving away from just importing American titles into developing more games in the UK. Ocean's response was *The Magnificent Seven*, showcasing its best games – and adding arcade conversion *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* as a bonus. With the likes of *Wizball*, *Head Over Heels* and Denton Designs' incredible *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* (inspired by the band) it was worth buying – even with the less-than-stellar *Cobra* and *Short Circuit* included.

The popular GEOS (Graphical Environment Operating System) was upgraded to version 2.0. While it was primarily designed for productivity software such as word processing and desktop publishing, this system inspired by the Macintosh's use of windows and icons would see some interesting and well-made games developed for it.

LICENSED GAMES GET BIG

From fast food to toys, licensed games became big business. Ocean became synonymous with films, thanks to Gary Bracey signing up the likes of *Platoon* and *RoboCop*. Sports stars got their own games, with notable names including Daley Thompson and Emlyn Hughes. The nadir would be Activision's licence of *Howard The Duck*, an unplayable mess made worse by the massive multiload.

"RUMOURS ALSO EMERGED OF A NEW MACHINE, INITIALLY REFERRED TO AS THE 64DX"

DEFINING GAMES

ARMALYTE

PUBLISHER THALAMUS
DEVELOPER CYBERDYNE SYSTEMS
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

Huge bosses, gorgeous graphics and an incredible Martin Walker soundtrack combine to make the sequel to Stavros Fasoulas' *Delta* an even greater game. A clever weapons system and simultaneous two-player add interest.

BOMBUZAL

PUBLISHER IMAGEWORKS
DEVELOPER TONY CROWTHER & DAVID BISHOP
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

Tony Crowther and David Bishop's bomb-blasting puzzle game has a unique choice of overhead (2D) and isometric (3D) views. Avoid blowing yourself up to progress through over 100 levels, including designs by Jeff Minter and Jon Ritman, among others.

IKARI WARRIORS

PUBLISHER ELITE SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER JOHN TWIDDY
HIGHEST SCORE 91% (COMMODORE FORCE)

Delayed by his work on *The Last Ninja*, John Twiddy delivered a technically impressive take on the SNK coin-op. With simultaneous two-player and the little tanks to drive around in, this recreated the vertically scrolling run-and-gun game exceptionally well.

MICROPROSE SOCCER

PUBLISHER MICROPROSE
DEVELOPER SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

Inspired by arcade title *Tehkan World Cup*, Sensible Software offered this to multiple publishers before getting the MicroProse big box treatment. Action replays, banana shots, weather effects and the hectic six-a-side indoor game make an amazing precursor to *Sensible Soccer*.

PLATOON

PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER ZACK TOWNSEND, ANDREW SLEIGH
HIGHEST SCORE 94% (ZZAP!64)

Simon Butler's design document laid the foundations for future Ocean film tie-ins, taking sequences from the films and building levels around different gameplay styles. The first-person view of the Tunnels is particularly noteworthy, along with Jonathan Dunn's haunting soundtrack.

"THE PROMISE WAS... AT LEAST TWO YEARS BETWEEN A FULL-PRICE RELEASE AND A BUDGET RE-RELEASE"

1989

In Germany, Commodore's sponsorship of football team Bayern Munich was ending. The company continued to sponsor Chelsea in England (from 1987 until 1994), and Paris Saint-Germain (for the 1993-1994 season). But Commodore Germany would use the cartoon image of a Bayern player on the front of its Video Supergame 64 bundle. This featured a C64G, power supply, joystick and a specially-made cartridge. The cartridge contained three games – the classic *International Soccer*, *Colossus Chess 2.0* and *Silicon Syborgs* (a renamed version of the Epyx title *Silicon Warrior*). This bundle seemed to inspire Commodore UK, as we shall see in 1990.

Sadly, Epyx itself was in financial trouble. The company had poured vast amounts into developing its own portable console, known as the Handy, with former Amiga designers RJ Mical and Dave Needle working on the machine. With money running out Epyx licensed the hardware to Atari, which gave it the name Lynx. Epyx concentrated on producing games for the new console, turning its back on the C64. But there would be an excellent C64 conversion of Lynx launch title *Chip's Challenge* to be enjoyed in 1991.

Ocean officially launched its budget label known as The Hit Squad this year, although the label had already been used for the successful series of compilations known as *They Sold A Million*. Games were divided into categories and given release numbers. Puzzle, Movie and Arcade branding made them collectable and looked uniform on the shelf. The promise was that it would be at least two years between a full-price release and a budget re-release.

US Gold's Kixx budget label had emerged the previous year, while Silverbird had been successful in re-releasing old Activision titles and Mastertronic's Ricochet label had its share of classics at a low price. And those Ricochet games often had the benefit of Invade-A-Load (with Rob Hubbard's brilliant *One Man And His Droid* music playing) to enjoy while the main game loaded.

At the top of Commodore, Mehdi Ali was appointed president after his previous role as a consultant advising on restructuring the company. The Amiga had sold over a million machines by now and Commodore seemed to be in a healthy position heading into the new decade.

DEFINING GAMES

CITADEL

PUBLISHER ELECTRIC DREAMS
DEVELOPER MARTIN WALKER
HIGHEST SCORE 91% (ZZAP!64)

■ Following up the amazing *Hunter's Moon*, the *Zzap!64* diary chronicled Martin Walker mixing up a board game and shoot-'em-ups to create a unique atmosphere. Find switches and extra weapons, even take over enemies, to conquer eight automated citadels.

LASER SQUAD

PUBLISHER BLADE SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER JULIAN GOLLOP
HIGHEST SCORE 92% (COMMODORE USER)

■ Julian Gollop established the turn-based genre with *Rebelstar* on ZX Spectrum and took it further with this game before he worked on the *XCOM* series. Kit out your marines, complete your missions and then try the fantasy-themed *Lords Of Chaos* as well.

MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

PUBLISHER SYSTEM 3
DEVELOPER PETER BARON & BOB STEVENSON
HIGHEST SCORE 94%(ZZAP!64)

■ Taking Greek, Viking and Egyptian myths to form its time-travel story, the superb rotoscoping animation of the main hero is appreciated. Clever puzzles and a hectic shoot-'em-up section play out to an amazing Maniacs Of Noise soundtrack.

SPACE ROGUE

PUBLISHER ORIGIN SYSTEMS
DEVELOPER PAUL NEURATH
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (ZZAP!64)

■ Years after *Elite*, this mixture of space-trading sim and RPG wowed the critics with its impressive 3D graphics. Cutscenes tell the story as you take on the invading aliens, or just play the Hive arcade game.

SPEEDBALL

PUBLISHER IMAGE WORKS
DEVELOPER ANDREW BOWEN
HIGHEST SCORE 90% (ZZAP!64)

■ The Bitmap Brothers' classic received a superb conversion. The killer soundtrack by David Whittaker and slick metallic menus give way to fast-paced action as players fight over the steel ball. The sequel, converted by Carl Muller, is also worth playing.

TAKING ON THE 16-BITS

■ Despite continued attempts to write off the C64, there was no doubt it was still capable of taking on the 16-bit machines. High-profile 16-bit games, such as *Stunt Car Racer*, were getting a C64 conversion, often using the disk drive to load in extra presentation. Original C64 games continued to fly the flag and while prices were rising, they were still less than 16-bit gamers were paying.

» [C64] Impressive 3D tank sim *Battle Command* could use the Annihilator joystick's second button for extra functions.

1990

This was a strange year for Commodore. Its line-up of new machines included the very forward-looking CDTV (based on Amiga hardware) and the backwards-looking C64GS console (see Commodore Consoles Itself). New Amiga models would follow, including the AGA-based Amiga 1200 and the overpriced Amiga 600. Advertising had the tagline, "This Christmas there is a little bit of Commodore in all of us," which nobody understood.

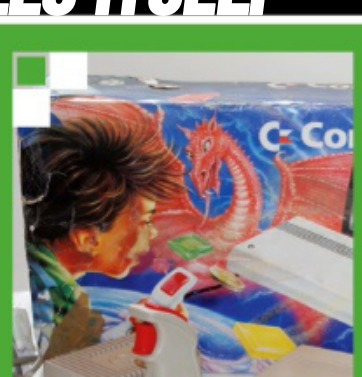
The consoles were on the warpath. The NES came bundled with the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* game in the UK and was a sales juggernaut, catching up with the established Master System. The Mega Drive arrived with *Altered Beast*, heralding the 16-bit console era. Importers could take their chances on the PC Engine and the high-spec Neo Geo. So where did that leave the humble 8-bit computer?

The answer was found reading the newly launched *Commodore Format* from Future Publishing. With the help of several former *Zzap!64* writers, the magazine provided both game reviews and more serious coverage. Every issue came with a covertape (*The Power Pack*) containing previews of new games, complete titles both old and previously unreleased, and occasionally utility software. It soon rivalled *Zzap!64* for sales, which went back to being C64 only. However, *YC* (formerly *Your Commodore*) would go out of business and its writers moved on to the short-lived *Commodore Power* from music magazine publishers Lime Lizard. The letters page of *Zzap!64* was dominated for months by debate about the C65 – the new name for the C64DX. A younger generation of players was being handed down the computer, and the magazines would eventually change their style to accommodate them.

Commodore had promised over a hundred new cartridge titles in time for Christmas, compatible with the computer as well as the C64GS, but the reality was much smaller with only a few publishers backing the system. Commodore's insistence on clamping down on the manufacturers of 'clone' drives such as the Excelerator meant users were forced to pay the higher price for Commodore's own drives.

COMMODORE CONSOLES ITSELF

Commodore UK released the C64 Games System (C64GS) – a C64C motherboard in a console-style case, bundled with the Cheetah Annihilator joystick and a four-game cartridge. John Twiddy and Mev Dinc designed the official development system. Ocean had its own development system, based on Paul Hughes' Freeload, and made full use of the cartridge format to create highly playable games (including superb coin-op conversion *Pang*, *Battle Command*, a remake of *Double Dragon*, and film tie-in *Navy Seals* that seamlessly loaded extra bitmap screens.)



» [C64] *Fiendish Freddie's Big Top O' Fun* was one of four games included on the C64GS cartridge.

"COMMODORE HAD PROMISED OVER A HUNDRED NEW CARTRIDGE TITLES IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS..."

DEFINING GAMES

CREATURES

PUBLISHER THALAMUS
DEVELOPER APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTIONS
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (ZZAP!64)

John and Steve Rowlands impressed with shoot-'em-up *Retrograde*, then followed up with this brutally humorous game. Clyde must rescue fellow Fuzzies from hilarious torture chambers, machines designed to maim and kill – after surviving the mammoth horizontally scrolling levels.

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE

PUBLISHER GREMLIN GRAPHICS
DEVELOPER MAGNETIC DREAMS
HIGHEST SCORE 92% (ZZAP!64)

Young programmer Ashley Bennett pulled off a masterstroke, recreating the fast action of the 16-bit racer from Shaun Southern and Andrew Morris (who were long-term C64 fans). It even manages the two-player split-screen mode effectively.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER GRAFTGOLD
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (ZZAP!64)

Cute enemies, themed islands and large bosses – this was a sublime conversion delayed by a dispute between Taito and Firebird, ending up at Ocean Software. Somewhere over the rainbow, all games are this good, with hidden bonuses to discover as well.

SHADOW OF THE BEAST

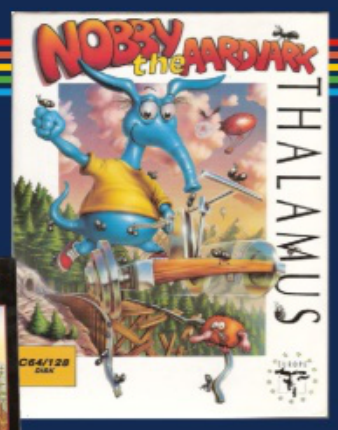
PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER OCEAN SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE 86% (ZZAP!64)

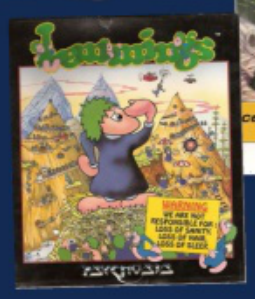
Super-smooth parallax scrolling and amazing conversions of the David Whittaker soundtrack set the scene for this 16-bit conversion, made possible by the memory capacity of the cartridge format. While the gameplay remains limited, the spectacle is pretty much intact.

TV SPORTS FOOTBALL

PUBLISHER CINEMAWARE
DEVELOPER ALIEN TECHNOLOGY GROUP
HIGHEST SCORE 92% (ZZAP!64)

From the pre-match commentary to the play selection menus, this was an impressive conversion from the 16-bit machines. With a Single Match or Season mode, the disk-only release has depth for fans of American football.





"A RETURN TO BEDROOM DEVELOPMENT AND GAMES SOLD IN PLASTIC BAGS"

» The last game from Thalamus, *Nobby The Aardvark* featured gorgeous cartoon graphics.

» [C64] *Chuck Rock* got an impressive C64 conversion from Italian company Genias.

1991+

The dominance of the 16-bit consoles saw less shop space for 8-bit computers. And then Commodore itself went bankrupt in 1994, after years of mistakes and mismanagement. The botched CD32 launch and the inferior performance of the C64GS – estimates put it at less than 10,000 sold – meant the end for the pioneering company that had brought computers to the masses. The C65 prototypes were sold off as part of the liquidation. Amstrad's 8-bit GX4000 console and the Plus range also failed before Sir Alan bought us the Em@iler. We're still not gloating.

Gradually software houses stopped producing new games, although stalwarts such as Zeppelin and Alternative continued. *Zzap!64* survived the bankruptcy of Newsfield, re-emerged under Europress Impact and rebranded as *Commodore Force* – closing after just 16 issues. *Commodore Format* gamely continued until October 1995 (outliving *Amstrad Action* and *Your Sinclair*) even as its page count dwindled. It was then up to the fanzines and clubs to take over, including *Commodore Scene* and *Commodore Zone* which promoted new games. CMD had launched its own magazine, *Commodore World*, and started selling the SuperCPU accelerator. Its 25MHz co-processor gave a speed boost to classic games but was best used for the outstanding shoot-'em-up *Metal Dust* developed to take advantage of the add-on.

There were bright spots in these dark times. Small developers and companies continued, selling via mail order; a return to bedroom development and games sold in plastic bags with home-printed labels and manuals. Another short-lived venture was EDOS – Electronic Distribution Of Software. The kiosks in John Menzies' shops duplicated the cassette or disk, printing a manual for the generic cases. There was also a mail-order catalogue to buy from, but the kiosks soon disappeared from the high street – along with John Menzies.

There were also many unreleased titles to find. That led to the creation of the excellent website Games That Weren't by Frank Gasking. The digital archaeologist and his dedicated team have tracked down developers and thoroughly researched what happened to many anticipated titles. Successes included *Daffy Duck*, *Solar Jetman* and what remained of *Deadlock* by Cyberdyne Systems. Elusive games such as *Murder* by US Gold and Konami's *Batman Returns* remain undiscovered.

DEFINING GAMES

SMASH TV

PUBLISHER OCEAN SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER PROBE SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (COMMODORE FORMAT)
YEAR 1991

Nick Jones nailed the essence of the classic Williams coin-op, even managing to include a dual-joystick control option. Large numbers of enemies attack constantly and there are formidable bosses to defeat, backed by a brilliant Jeroen Tel soundtrack.

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

PUBLISHER RAINBOW ARTS
DEVELOPER MANFRED TRENZ
HIGHEST SCORE 96% (COMMODORE FORMAT)
YEAR 1991

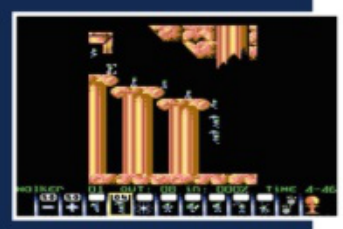
The original *Turrican* by Manfred Trenz had been mind-blowing, but the sequel pushed the C64 even harder. Massive scrolling levels, in-game music, incredible bosses bigger than the screen and three shoot-'em-up levels make for a truly incredible sequel.

MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND

PUBLISHER MAIL ORDER ONLY GAMES
DEVELOPER APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTIONS
HIGHEST SCORE 100% (COMMODORE FORMAT)
YEAR 1993

John and Steve Rowlands pushed the C64 hard to create this fast-paced console-style game, with *Mayhem* turning the Sad levels into Happy ones by collecting Magic Dust and then gathering stars. It boasts gorgeous graphics, superb sound and amazing presentation.

LEMMINGS



PUBLISHER PSYGNOSIS
DEVELOPER E&E SOFTWARE
HIGHEST SCORE 97% (COMMODORE FORCE)
YEAR 1994

A Dutch team took on the seemingly impossible task of converting the 16-bit puzzler and succeeded in style, from the amazing intro to the smooth mouse controls. Spanning six disk sides, this deserved the high review scores it received.

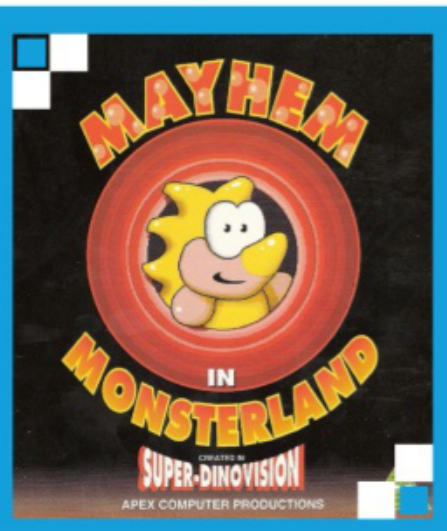
METAL WARRIOR

PUBLISHER N/A
DEVELOPER COVERT BITOPS
HIGHEST SCORE N/A
YEAR 1999

Coder Lasse Õörni started this amazing series of homebrew games set in a near-future city, where you perform errands and play in a metal band with a combination of gunplay and exploration. Remade recently as the outstanding *MW Ultra*.

MAIL-ORDER RESURGENCE

It was down to mail order to supply the remaining C64 fans, as full-price games became budget re-releases in just a few months. Companies such as Alternative started selling off stock directly and magazine pages were dominated by sale listings from resellers. The swansong *Mayhem In Monsterland*, hyped up by *Commodore Format*'s diary and 100% review, was marketed directly to the customer. Small homebrew publishers such as Psytronik emerged, trying to fill the gap.



2000+

The Internet helped keep the Commodore 64 alive during the Noughties. Huge archives such as Gamebase64 with 30,000 games (gb64.com) and the High Voltage SID Collection with over 55,000 tunes (hvsc.c64.org) showed how much interest there still was. While the Commodore trademarks and properties changed hands, fans were keeping the spirit alive. Crackers produced 'jewel' releases of old games, adding documentation and cheats, as well as fixing bugs.

The bizarre Web.It machine was an early example of exploiting the trademark, sold on the strength of its built-in C64 emulator and easy Web access. Hardware hacker Jeri Ellsworth went one better and worked on the C64DTV, a plug-and-play console shaped like a classic Competition Pro joystick with 30 built-in games from publishers including Epyx and Hewson. The C64DTV would be hacked and added to, from soldering on an SD card to adding a keyboard or being turned into a mini-PC in a case. It would be the precursor to other hardware forms (see Continuing Comeback).

The demo scene continued to impress and astound, with great art, music and technical trickery. Parties held online and in-person generated more original work. Fan groups on social media led to the creation of #C64month on Twitter every August, celebrating the retail launch back in August 1982. The popular emulators including CCS64 and VICE (Versatile Commodore Emulator, capable of emulating multiple Commodore 8-bit machines) developed quickly and appeared on many machines. VICE was also at the heart of the official emulation package, Commodore Forever from Cloanto, the company that holds the rights to the ROM images.

The remix scene formed around RKO (remix.kwed.org) and Remix64 (remix64.com). To complement the CDs and MP3s, live music arrived in the form of the Back In Time events organised by Chris Abbott (c64audio.com), culminating in the amazing 8-Bit Symphony performed live in 2019 with the Hull Symphony Orchestra. Companies such as Psytronik and Protovision set the standard for boxed releases, with RGCD producing fantastic cartridges (including the astounding demakes from Paul Koller) and indie developers are picking up the torch.

CONTINUING COMEBACK

There are many options to get your C64 fix – emulation, digital downloads, USB cassettes, disks, and cartridges. Fast-loading options such as Kung Fu Flash and 1541-Ultimate II make things easier, and The C64 Mini and The C64 from Retro Games Limited plug into modern TVs. The incredible MEGA65 is based on Commodore's plans for the unreleased Commodore 65, and the Ultimate64 motherboard has HDMI output and support for twin SID chips.

"FAN GROUPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA LED TO THE CREATION OF #C64MONTH ON TWITTER EVERY AUGUST"

DEFINING GAMES

BOMBERLAND

PUBLISHER RGCD
DEVELOPER SAMAR
HIGHEST SCORE N/A
YEAR 2013

There had been multiple attempts, but Samar created the ultimate C64 take on *Bomberman*. With an adaptor, you can have up to five players in multiplayer mode, and there's a single-player campaign to take on as well.

SAM'S JOURNEY

PUBLISHER PROTOVISION
DEVELOPER KNIGHTS OF BYTES
HIGHEST SCORE N/A
YEAR 2017

Announced on April Fool's Day, this was no joke – a superb platformer that challenged *Mayhem* for the crown. Collect costumes with special abilities, find hidden secrets and explore massive levels for diamonds in an epic game that you must play.

STEEL RANGER

PUBLISHER PROTOVISION
DEVELOPER COVERT BITOPS
HIGHEST SCORE N/A
YEAR 2018

Lasse Õörni improved his game engine (and Goattracker music routine) to produce this *Metroid* and *Turrican*-inspired title, with a ship crashing on an alien world populated by machines. It even has its equivalent of the Morph Ball.

THE BRILEY WITCH CHRONICLES

PUBLISHER WITCHSOFT
DEVELOPER SARAH JANE AVORY
HIGHEST SCORE 95% (RETRO GAMER)
YEAR 2021

Sarah Jane Avory's superb shoot-'em-ups (*Zeta Wing* and *Soul Force*) are recent hits, but this deep RPG has so much character, based on Sarah's own novels. An entertaining RPG with some very witty dialogue.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

PUBLISHER N/A
DEVELOPER MR SID
HIGHEST SCORE N/A
YEAR 2021

Reverse-engineering the Master System game, Andreas Varga (who also made a *Prince Of Persia* conversion) used Commodore's RAM Expansion Unit to create a silky-smooth scrolling engine that recreated Sonic's first 8-bit adventure.

WE ARE 64

KEY PLAYERS IN THE C64 SCENE, THEN AND NOW, SHARE THEIR MEMORIES

JEFF MINTER

FOUNDER OF LLAMASOFT

"I first saw a C64 towards the end of 1982, possibly at the PCW show. I think Rabbit Software had an imported one on display, but I can't really remember what it was running – nothing particularly amazing, obviously. Then at the same show, Jay [Balakrishnan] from HES gave me a US C64 of my own. I was much more impressed when I could actually use one. Sprites seemed like magic!

"The C64 era was a great time in my life. I had a good bunch of mates I'd hang out with all the time, and I could make a decent living by doing something I really enjoyed. That little machine gave me some of my best years. It was a significant platform that launched the careers of many a coder who would go on to be foundational members of the corporate 'games biz' that arose as the more idyllic early days drew to a close. It's technically interesting enough that people are still wringing new effects out of it, decades later."

CHRIS ABBOTT

C64 MUSIC GURU

"As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the C64 and its revolutionary SID chip, I can't help feeling that history has been largely dismissive of the ol' breadbin. They say the winner writes the history, and it's the consoles, backed by big money and big IP, that have taken the lion's share of history's plaudits. C64 software houses came and went, and it was up to fans to keep the history alive. Nevertheless, the contributions of Rob Hubbard, Martin Galway and Ben Daglish are largely forgotten and overlooked. Even NES chiptune fans seem to believe SIDs are an atonal mess.

"I'm working full-time on correcting this, from the orchestral stuff that proves that C64 music is worthy, to my books about sound chips and Rob Hubbard explaining in detail what he did, when he did it, and how he did it. It's an uphill struggle when the gatekeepers believe the only videogame music worth mentioning is *Final Fantasy*, *Mario* and *Zelda*, but I'm putting a lot of C64 resources into the educational sector. Let's see if we can't create a whole new audience!"

ANDY WALKER

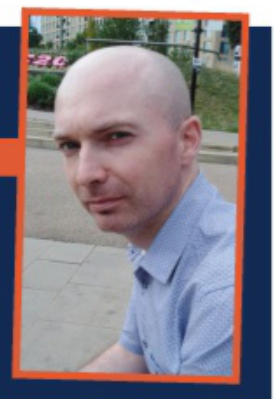
FOUNDER OF TASKSET

"Taskset grew from arcade game development with custom hardware, but our roots were in the 6502 [CPU] so when we heard about the C64, we knew we had to have one. And what a fabulous machine it was, obviously designed by gamers for gamers – and by smart businessmen with their own chip fabrication plant.

"Home computers were developing at a truly breath-taking speed and if you blinked, you missed the magical one. We were writing 100% Assembler for the VIC-20 and Oric, both 6502 machines, and the C64 blew them away. We knew it would be a massive seller and best of all we could dazzle with this hardware. The fabulous VIC-II and SID chips were the foundations of a generational leap in gaming technology, and it was a joy to drive them.

"I'm very proud of the Taskset C64 titles. You won't be surprised to hear *Super Pipeline II* is my favourite. We knew how to write games and how to present them. The C64 was easily the best in class and allowed us to narrow the gap from arcade to home games."

FRANK GASKING



AUTHOR OF GAMES THAT WEREN'T

"My first C64 experience was aged six at my elder sister's house in early 1988, seeing the iconic US Gold stars and stripes loader for *Buck Rogers*. I'd seen arcades, but never anything like this at home. Desperate for my own, my mum eventually obliged with a Light Fantastic pack in 1990, providing a magical memory of unpacking it and playing the likes of *Batman*. I would visit local shops and discover new games, get monthly magazines with their covermounts, and make my own games. Everything culminated in an interest in unreleased games and preservation and Games That Weren't was set up to recover many famous lost C64 titles.

"I never got rid of my C64, and still play games regularly. I've lived through bright times, dark times and now (thanks to the internet) through an amazing resurgence, where a great community produces new games on a regular basis once more. The C64 has provided so much joy over the years and continues to do so."

TONY CROWTHER

PROLIFIC C64 CODER

"I was 18, had just finished my A-levels and was planning my future when the Commodore 64 appeared on the scene. I had a Saturday job at Superior Systems in Sheffield, selling computers to the public. My parents had bought me a VIC-20 for Christmas, and I wrote a maze game called *Amazing* for it. The shopkeeper was impressed and asked if he could sell it in his shop. He then offered me a Commodore 64 for free if I wrote him six games. I took him up on the challenge and wrote *Balloon Rescue*, *Aztec Tomb*, *Damsel In Distress*, *Brands*, *Bat Attack* and *Squash A Frog*, all released under the Alligata logo. The first ones were written in BASIC, but I soon moved on to machine code, using a one-line assembler I wrote myself. The games weren't fantastic, but they got me hooked on programming and allowed me to train myself. Things started to get interesting for me when I did *Killer Watt*. I was flown up to Aberdeen to do an interview for [TV show] *Bits 'N' Pieces*. It's still my favourite of my C64 games."

VINNY MAINOLFI

EDITOR OF FREEZE64

"My first home computer was a TRS-80 Model 1 and I fell in love with it. I was in the Tandy shop in Bletchley all the time. I got to know the manager and I told him I'd saved up enough money and I was going to upgrade to a Tandy Color Computer. He looked at me and said, 'Nah, don't do that. Get yourself a Commodore 64. We're not selling them at the moment so take your money down to John Menzies and buy that instead.' Because of him, I became a C64 freak, and I know it's going to be with me for the rest of my life. I'm not going to be a saddo and get buried with it because there's more to life than a computer but it's the thing that keeps me sane and happy. Every day is a Commodore 64 day and that's the honest truth. A day doesn't go by where I'm not hacking, coding, writing, testing, or discussing all things C64. Life wouldn't be the same without it."

GARY PENN

EDITOR, ZZAP!64

"I think *Zzap!64* played a significant role in cementing the C64's legacy, just by being in the right place at the right time. There was this tribal thing going on and we definitely contributed to that. We provided a focal point. 'Bible' is a bit strong but there are parallels with cults and religions. Not in a sinister way but in how people would congregate around a certain thing and want to be part of a community. People love being in a tribe. We were a voice, a representative for the machine. We provided a 'binding service'.

"I sometimes play C64 games via emulation. *Zolyx* is so good and *Jumpman Junior* is full of fucking brilliant ideas. People were trying shit out at the dawn of the medium and there are some real gems. I still have an SX-64, the portable one – though it's so heavy, it really needs wheels – and I have some demo disks, including a version of *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, which the Palace Software boys did for my birthday. It's called *Antodgerad* and the main character has a massive cock. A lovely gift."

DAVID CRANE

PROGRAMMER OF LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE AND GHOSTBUSTERS

"A lot of people don't realise that for people like me who have been in the videogame business for parts of six decades, a new [system] is a mixed blessing. Imagine, in whatever your job might be, that every two years or so, everything changes. The tools you have been using are now obsolete, the deepest knowledge, or, if appropriate to your job, the finest motor skills you have been using, have to be completely unlearned. Like with many other game [systems], that was the introduction of the C64 for developers. We needed to create new development systems, new compressors/decompressors, new audio and sound effects drivers and, in many cases, new sprite-drawing tools. It was a massive amount of work – and required redesigning ourselves.

"That said, once all of the work was done, making games for the C64 was great fun. With an integrated keyboard and great backgrounds, sprites and colour modes, the games could be next generation. It even had a usable interrupt to help with real-time code execution. See my brochure that let you create a running Pitfall Harry by typing a program in BASIC!"

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SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

ATARI 2600 GAMES

With the first titan of videogames celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, it's high time we looked at collecting for its most successful home console, from the cartridges that should be in every collection to some true rarities

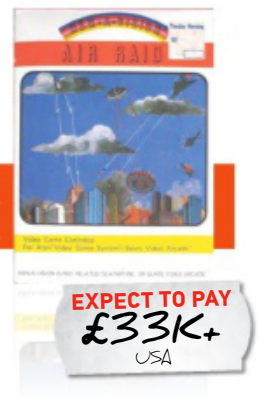
Words by Nick Thorpe

» [Atari 2600] No, we're still not convinced. Maybe if there was a talking dog or something.

RAID YOUR SAVINGS

AIR RAID

DEVELOPER: MEN-A-VISION
RELEASE: 1982



EXPECT TO PAY £33K+ USA

■ If you've never heard of Men-A-Vision, you're not alone. *Air Raid* was the only game ever developed and published by the small developer, and it was no hit – the game was not widely distributed and few copies were ever sold to begin with. For many years, it couldn't even be confirmed that the game had even had a manual.

That situation changed when Harv Bennett dragged a complete copy of *Air Raid* out of storage in 2012. It sold for a whopping $33,433.30 at auction that same year, and it remains the only known complete copy of the game to this day, although a couple of other boxed copies are known to exist.

Even if you're not worried about having the box, adding this rare cartridge to your collection will cost a pretty penny. The winning bid for the most-recent loose copy of the game was $10,590.79, and years will pass between copies showing up for sale as only 13 are known to exist. If your pockets are deep enough to contemplate buying one, we wish you luck.

» [Atari 2600] Take that corporate rivals. Yep, that's really shown them.

EXPECT TO PAY £3,000+ USA

NUMBER TWO

The next most-valuable Atari 2600 game

■ Although *Air Raid* is the most-expensive Atari 2600 game, the next most-valuable rarity is arguably far better known due to its status as a piece of cola wars nostalgia. At Coca-Cola's 1983 sales conference, 125 executives were given Atari 2600 consoles and specially commissioned *Pepsi Invaders* games – a simple hack of *Space Invaders*, in which the iconic aliens are replaced with the name of Coca-Cola's rival company.

Many of the executives reportedly discarded their games, diminishing further the small, non-commercial print run. That careless action has ensured that *Pepsi Invaders* is a true rarity today, and it's a release that many collectors want to add to their collections. If we're honest though, it really only has notoriety going for it today. There are plenty of reproduction copies out there, but when an authentic one does surface you should expect to pay at least £850 for a loose copy. On the rare occasion a boxed one turns up, expect a much heftier outlay of about £3,000 – enough to buy 6,240 cans of Coke, or 7,200 cans of Pepsi if you prefer it.

» [Atari 2600] Rag on it all you want, we grew up with this and actually liked it.

INFINITE SUPPLY

PAC-MAN

EXPECT TO PAY £17+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: ATARI
RELEASE: 1982

■ If you're looking to collect games that tell the story of the Atari 2600, Tod Frye's conversion of Namco's classic maze game is essential. It's an infamous arcade conversion due to its differences to the arcade original, and both the later *Ms Pac-Man* conversion and fan efforts like *Pac-Man 4K* have shown that the console could have delivered a more authentic experience. Even so, *Pac-Man* sold over seven million copies and became the system's best-selling game.

While it's not a particularly brilliant Atari 2600 game, it also won't break the bank. PAL players don't really have to worry about any variants here, and it's cheaper overall than the North American release – we're not sure why, but we'd guess it's potentially due to the notoriety of the game. If you're not a PAL collector, there are a few North American variants, including an expensive Sears version and a Not For Resale badged version that came bundled with consoles.

» [Atari 2600] Readers of a certain vintage will be hearing the Tarzan sound right about now.

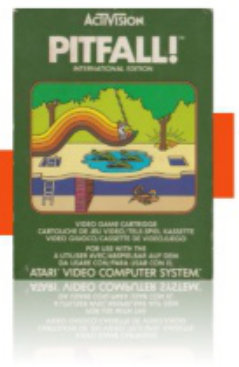
» [Atari 2600] Why do game designers always make scorpions into tricky enemies? Answers on a postcard.

IT'S NO MONEY PIT

PITFALL!

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ EUROPE

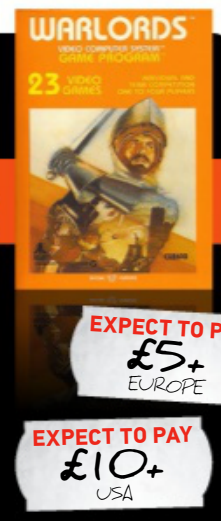


DEVELOPER: ACTIVISION
RELEASE: 1982

■ If you just want great Atari 2600 games, David Crane's platformer is an excellent one to start with, with its highly detailed graphics and great challenge ensuring that it is often found on lists of the console's best games. Although it was very popular and sold millions of copies, its reputation ensures that it commands a reasonable price. Variant hunters will like this one, as the PAL release has both black-and-white text labels as well as the standard green picture label, though none of these seems to be significantly different in value to the others. There's also a blue text label variant for North American buyers to hunt down.

THAT'S A PADDLIN'

WARLORDS

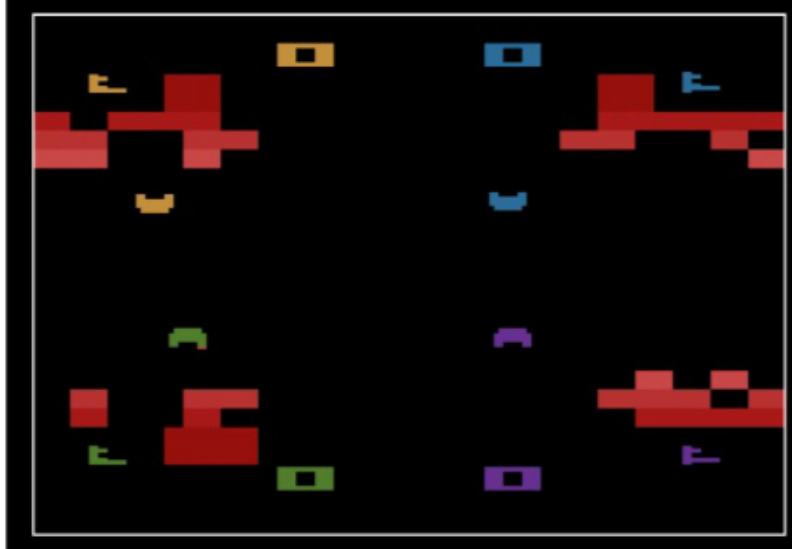


EXPECT TO PAY £5+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ USA

DEVELOPER: INDESCOMP
RELEASE: 1984

■ Warlords is a hybrid of *Quadrapong* and *Breakout*, in which you seek to break your opponents' walls and crush their castles. It's something of a technical rarity on the Atari 2600 – relatively few games utilise the paddle controller, and fewer still accommodate four players simultaneously. It's also one of the console's best games, as four players can have just as much fun with it today as they would have done 40 years ago. If you're buying PAL there's only one version to worry about, but North American buyers can find a Sears Tele-Games variant too. That can sell for up to four times the price of the standard Atari version, so you should really only opt for it if you happen to be specifically collecting those releases.



» [Atari 2600] All you have to do is defend your wall. It sounds so very, very easy.

PADDLE POWER

Three more classic paddle games to consider

EXPECT TO PAY £17+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ EUROPE

Kaboom!

This excellent game from Activision pits you against the Mad Bomber, as you try to thwart his bomb-throwing exploits with just a few baskets. If you're a variant collector, the later blue label variant of the North American version is considerably more expensive than the original release.

Circus Atari

Bounce your man on the see-saw to pop the balloons at the top of the screen – a simple task, but one that's quite compelling when you get into its rhythm. Both European and US releases have plain text label and picture label variants, the latter being slightly cheaper.

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ EUROPE / USA

Solar Storm

Imagic's shoot-'em-up is not particularly cheap no matter where you are, but the intensity of the action might make it worth your while. Both you and your relentlessly descending foes are armed with instant death lasers, so avoiding their single shots is key. Hard, but fun.

EXPECT TO PAY £40+ EUROPE / USA

Stay focussed

The Atari 2600 library is very big, so if you're starting out it's best to set a collecting goal – maybe a certain publisher's games, or particular variants.

Box clever

Games in cardboard boxes always tend to attract premium pricing based on condition. Be prepared to grab bargains on slightly tatty copies of games.

Look around

As always, eBay attracts higher prices because most people are looking there. Join Facebook groups and scour local sales listings for better deals.

Discover the Atari 2800

The Atari 2600 was rebranded the 2800 in Japan, but ran face first into the Famicom. Its library is tiny, but the games are pretty hard to source.

DOWN SINCE DAY ONE

COMBAT

EXPECT TO PAY £6+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £8.50+ USA

DEVELOPER: ATARI
RELEASE: 1977

One easy subset of Atari 2600 games you could look to collect is the nine launch games, and *Combat* is easily the most iconic of the bunch. The concept of a tank duel against another player is very simple, almost as simple as the graphics, but the cartridge packs some good variety due to its inclusion of various modes with bouncing missiles, fighter jets and biplanes. Since there's no computer opponent in any mode, a second player is essential to enjoy the game properly. You'll find both picture and text label versions of *Combat* floating around, and if you're looking to complete a Sears Tele-Games variant collection, the game was released in that range under the name *Tank Plus*.

» [Atari 2600] Blowing things up has always been a key videogame objective. That's just how it is.

» [Atari 2600] If you can dominate your friends in the sky too, you are the master of *Combat*.

LAUNCH CREW

Other Atari 2600 games from the very start

Indy 500

A very basic top-down racing game, in which you attempt to complete as many laps as possible within the time limit. Some copies of this game came bundled with special racing paddle controllers, which can push the price up a little.

EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £12.50+ USA

Air-Sea Battle

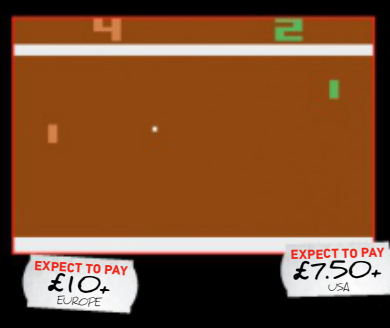
Trying to achieve military supremacy is the aim of the game here, with players competing to destroy either enemy weapons or each other. There's a picture label version and a text label version, and the Sears variant is called *Target Fun*.

EXPECT TO PAY £9+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £8.50+ USA

Video Olympics

You might be expecting all sorts of wild sporting fun from this title, but it's actually rather misleading. The Sears variant title of *Pong Sports* is more informative, as it's a cartridge that explores variations of the 1972 hit.



EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £7.50+ USA

CHASE RARE

CHASE THE CHUCK WAGON

EXPECT TO PAY £410+ USA

DEVELOPER: ICOM/TMQ
RELEASE: 1983

As a mail-order exclusive offered by pet-food producer Purina, this maze game was once something of a byword for rare videogames. These days, we know that *Chase The Chuck Wagon* is not nearly the rarest of Atari 2600 games, but it is genuinely uncommon as response to the promotion was rather weak. It's also not a particularly brilliant game, as programmer Mike Schwartz had just a few days to put it together. It remains sufficiently well-known to ensure that collectors retain an interest in the game, with even loose copies regularly selling for over £100. There are plenty of better games out there, but mentioning this one can still cause the eyes of some veteran collectors to light up.

» [Atari 2600] It was made to advertise dog food, so we can't expect too much from this.

» [Atari 2600] It is ironic that it ended up being such a dog's dinner of a game, though.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

SOLARIS

EXPECT TO PAY £8.50+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £2.50+ EUROPE

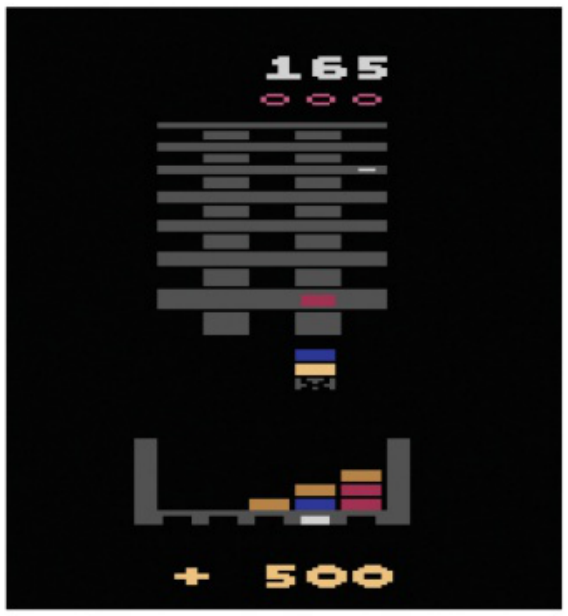
DEVELOPER: DOUG NEUBAUER
RELEASE: 1986

If you want to see just how far the Atari 2600 was pushed during its commercial lifespan, *Solaris* really shows the system at its finest. As well as being a graphical marvel that looks like it's running on far more advanced hardware, *Solaris* is absolutely enormous in scope – you'll have regular battles with other spacecraft, rescue friendly cadets, undertake defence missions and even manage your fuel supplies. You can really tell it's from the same mind behind *Star Raiders*.

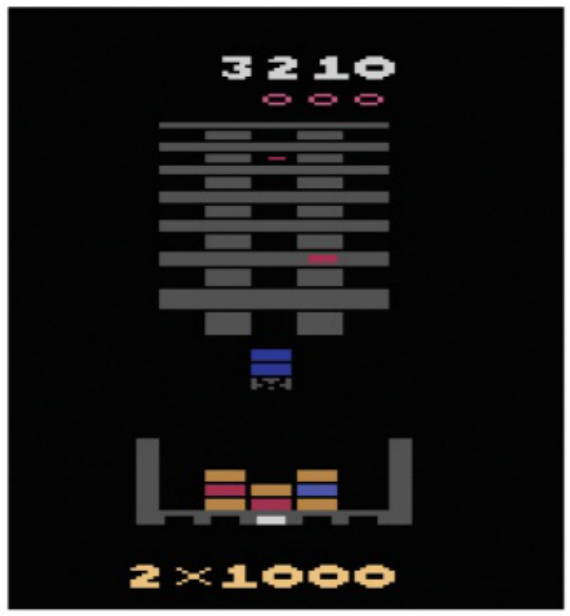
Despite this, it won't break the bank. The North American release is easy to find at reasonable prices, and while we've seen the PAL release go for around the £10 mark, we've also seen complete boxed copies selling at well under £5 at auction. Frankly, that's a bit of a steal for a game of this quality, and we honestly wouldn't be terribly surprised if the price rises because we've highlighted that fact. Sorry.

» [Atari 2600] How many Atari 2600 games look this good? Seriously, list them. We'll wait.

» [Atari 2600] We were sent to outer space to find another race. They had guns. Whoops.



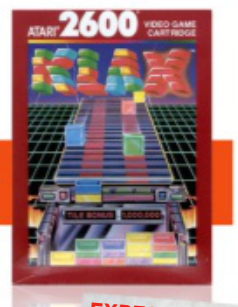
» [Atari 2600] It's not pretty, but *Klax* plays well enough on Atari's venerable console.



» [Atari 2600] Everything you can do in the fancier, more modern versions still works here.

THERE IS TIME FOR...

KLAX



EXPECT TO PAY £10+ EUROPE/USA

DEVELOPER: AXLON
RELEASE: 1990

■ It's rather amazing that this arcade puzzle game made its way to the Atari 2600, and it just goes to show how long the console received commercial support. Although it is heavily simplified visually, the game still plays well enough to be a worthwhile addition to your library – as long as you're a PAL gamer, as this didn't receive a North American release. Something interesting has happened with this game, as a number of copies were recently available for as little as £4, brand-new and sealed. That supply now seems to have dried up and the price has shot up again, hovering around the region of £10-15. Despite that, at the time of writing it actually seems that more sealed copies are available on eBay than there are used copies, which is an extremely unusual state of affairs for a game that's over 30 years old.

» [Atari 2600] To be fair to Atari, *Demon Attack* does look a lot like Phoenix at first glance.

» [Atari 2600] *Demon Attack* is one of the system's best shooters and is available at a great price as well.

DODGY DEMONS

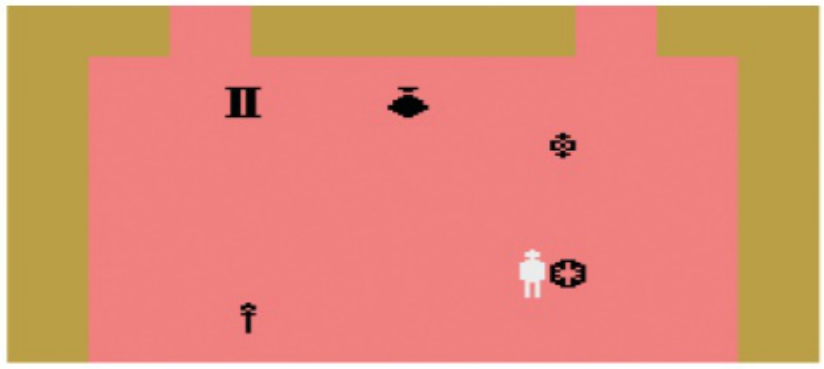
DEMON ATTACK

EXPECT TO PAY £16+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £13.50+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: IMAGIC
RELEASE: 1982

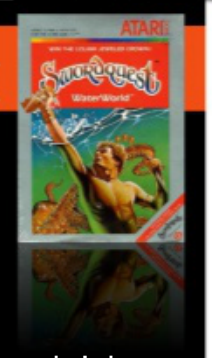
■ Rob Fulop's excellent shoot-'em-up is a reasonably priced game that could have ended up being far more expensive than it actually is. Atari sued Imagic over the game in 1982, alleging that it was a clone of *Phoenix* – an arcade game that Atari had already licensed the conversion rights for. That was more true of the Intellivision version of *Demon Attack* than the Atari one, but the suit was settled out of court regardless, preventing the game from being withdrawn from sale and becoming ridiculously rare. It's reasonably priced these days, with variants including text and picture versions of the foil label, plus blue text NTSC and white text PAL versions. There's also an Activision-branded version with a red label to look out for.



ABANDONED QUEST

SWORDQUEST: WATERWORLD

EXPECT TO PAY £675+ USA



DEVELOPER: ATARI
RELEASE: 1984

■ The *Swordquest* series was an incredibly ambitious multimedia project, spanning four planned games and tie-in comics, with the central appeal of each adventure being the chance to win a valuable prize. Unfortunately for Atari, the videogame market crash happened right in the middle of the series and the act of giving away an expensive prize suddenly became rather less appealing, so the third game was only made available to members of the Atari Club. As a result, it is considerably rarer than the first two entries in the series, with even loose cartridges fetching $250-300. The cancellation of the fourth game, *Swordquest: Airworld*, ended the series prematurely.

» [Atari 2600] It's time for swimming! Because it is a world of water. A *Waterworld*, if you will.

PREVIOUS QUESTS

The other two games in the Swordquest series

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ USA

Swordquest: Earthworld

The first game in the series allowed players to quest for the Talisman Of Penultimate Truth. Of 5,000 contest entrants, only eight gave the correct answer and made it to the finals, with Steven Bell ultimately taking the prize – valued at a whopping $25,000.

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ USA

Swordquest: Fireworld

The clues were a little less obscure for the second game in the series, with 73 players providing a correct answer in pursuit of the Chalice Of Light. This was won by Michael Rideout, who reportedly kept the valuable prize and still owns it today.

Light Force

NO FRILLS, PLENTY OF THRILLS

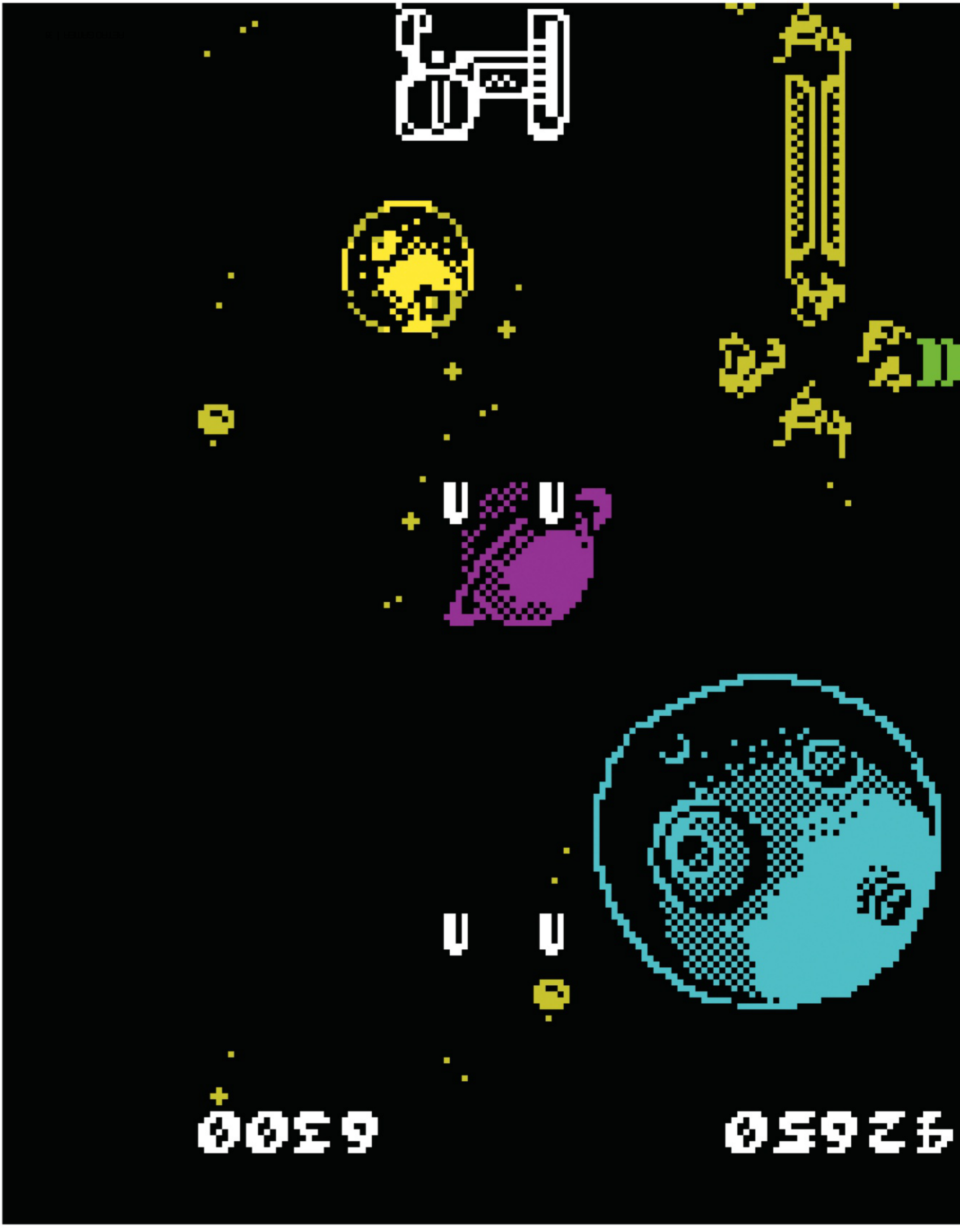
» ZX SPECTRUM » 1986 » GARGOYLE GAMES

According to World Of Spectrum, Gargoyle Games only released three titles for the rubber-keyed wonder under its Faster Than Light publishing label. It turns out that I've played them all, but for some reason *Shockway Rider* was the only Faster Than Light release that I owned on my Amstrad CPC.

I used to play *Hydrofool* and *Light Force* on my friend's Spectrum and it was Gargoyle Game's slick shooter that left the biggest impression on me at the time. While the first level is a relatively simple affair that sees your oddly shaped fighter blasting through an asteroid belt things get more hectic once you reach The Jungle Planet, which is not only bursting with colour, but also appears to have no attribute clash whatsoever. It's a remarkable feat of engineering and it's a pity we didn't see more games from Gargoyle Game's new publishing arm.

Unlike *Hydrofool* which works as a sequel to the delightfully odd *Sweevo's World*, *Light Force* is a more conventional arcade-style shooter with large enemies, smooth scrolling and raucous sound effects. You won't find ambitious boss fights and inventive power-ups (or any power-ups at all for that matter), but you will find stunning visuals, challenging attack waves and smart level design.

It's a little too stiff a challenge for me (I've yet to clear the third stage) but that difficulty certainly hasn't put me off and I continually return to it. Weirdly, I also prefer it to the Amstrad CPC version, which feels a lot more sluggish in comparison, even though it has far better-looking visuals and even more colour. Fast and frantic and filled with neat little touches – I love how your score is displayed on the platforms you land on – *Light Force* is quite possibly one of the best vertically scrolling shooters the Spectrum ever received. What a shame we never got a sequel.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ULTIMATE GUIDE

SUPER MARIOLAND

SUPER MARIO LAND HAS ATTRACTED A REPUTATION OVER THE YEARS FOR BEING WEIRD AND OFF-KILTER. RETRO GAMER ARGUES THAT THE ONLY UNUSUAL THING ABOUT MARIO'S SMALL BUT MIGHTY HANDHELD ADVENTURE IS THAT IT'S UNBELIEVABLY GOOD

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

BATADON

DRAGONZAMASU

The story goes that distant Sarasaland had been invaded by the evil alien Tatanga who has cast a spell over the populace and kidnapped their princess, Daisy. Mario gets wind of this wickedness and sets off to save the day, bolstered by his two armoured vehicles: the submersible Marine Pop and the airborne Sky Pop. Hold up. Sarasaland and not the Mushroom Kingdom? Tatanga not Bowser? Daisy not Peach? And *vehicles*?

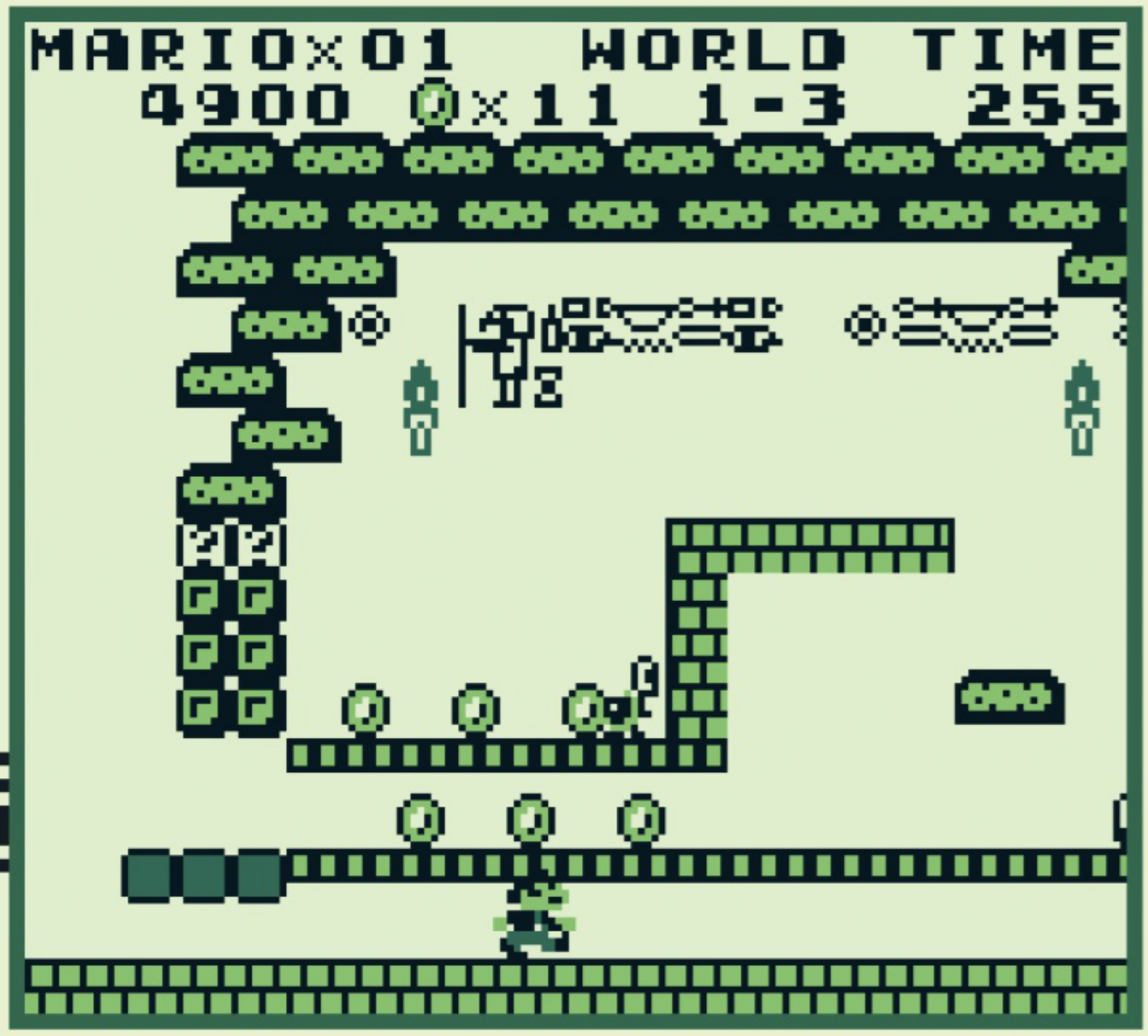
The story behind *that* story goes that Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi wanted a new *Mario* game to launch alongside the Game Boy in 1989, but as series creator Shigeru Miyamoto was busy producing games for the upcoming SNES console (including *F-Zero* and the next mainline *Mario* game), the task was entrusted to Miyamoto's mentor Gunpei Yokoi. This made perfect sense as Yokoi and his Nintendo R&D1 team developed the Game Boy, making them the ideal people to shrink *Super Mario Bros* and make it work on the handheld's tiny 2.6-inch screen. And so, without Miyamoto's involvement, Yokoi and director Satoru Okada cooked up a miniaturised version that resembled the NES original in most ways but introduced enough new elements to delight – and potentially irritate – *Mario* fans.

One noticeable change is the new setting. There are only 12 stages, but they are split over four separate 'kingdoms' which feature distinct themes. The opening Egyptian-inspired kingdom is not too far removed from Mario's usual stomping ground, but beyond this lies unfamiliar, almost alien environments inspired by Bermuda, Easter Island and ancient China. The enemies change too. Some, such as the Goomba-like Chibibo and those perennial Piranha Plants appear everywhere, but many of the others (which you can see dotted around this feature) are unique to their kingdoms and indeed, this Mario game. Each kingdom also has its very own boss to battle, which makes a nice change from the usual Bowser clones. In Sarasaland, Mario is a long way from home and it certainly feels that way.

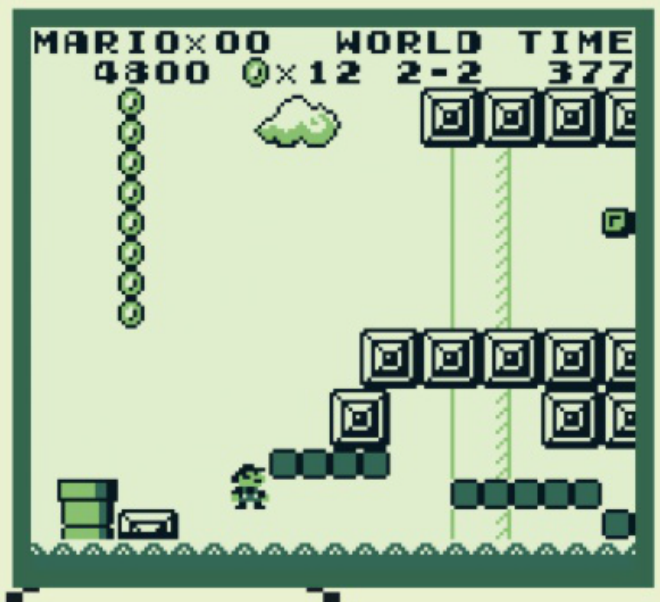
The actual gameplay is largely unchanged. Mushrooms make Mario bigger, Stars provide temporary invincibility, and the Flower power-up lets Mario shoot (although not fireballs – here he shoots Superballs which bounce off walls and floors, allowing you to perform some nifty trick ▶

BUNBUN

FLY



» [Game Boy] Size matters. The game features a number of routes that can only be accessed by regular-sized Mario.



» [Game Boy] Invisible blocks and hidden platforms, as pictured here, allow access to many secrets areas.

» [Game Boy] It's definitely worth checking every block just in case one hides coins or even a precious 1UP.

THE SUPER SEQUELS

HOW NINTENDO'S MINIATURE SERIES PROGRESSED

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

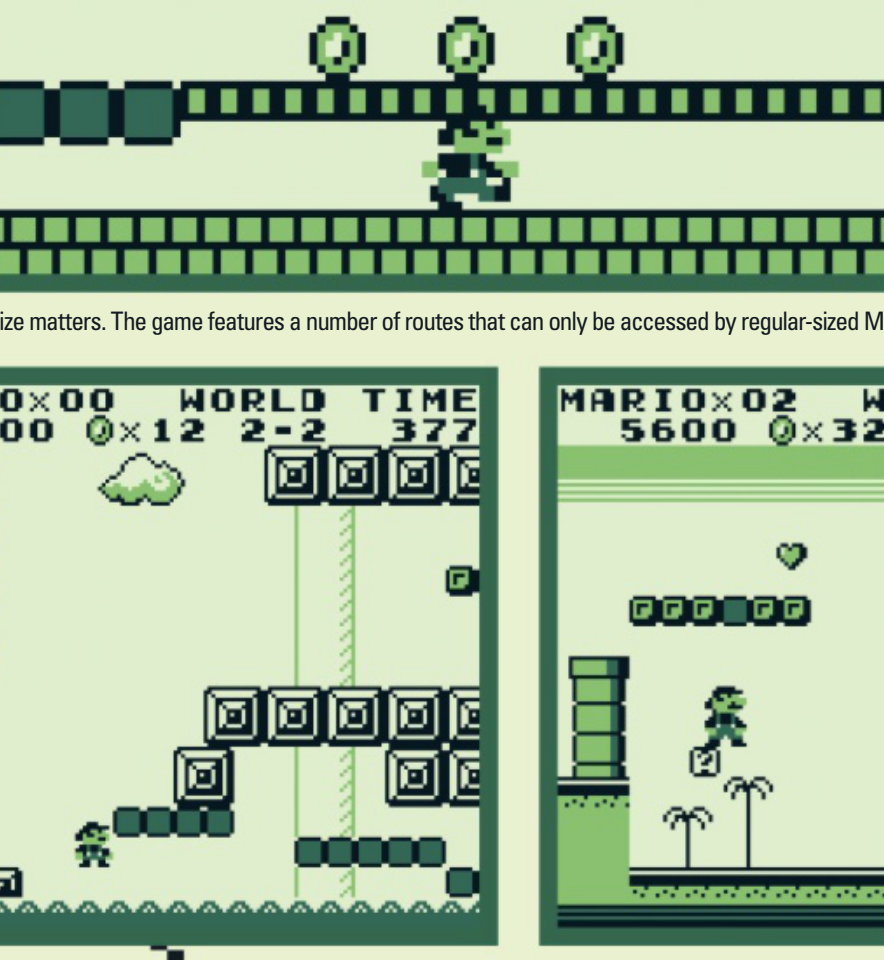
This is more of a traditional *Mario* game than the original, with the world map and many other features borrowed from the big brother console versions. The graphics are also larger, so it's easier on the eye but it's also more pedestrian. Nonetheless this is a strong sequel.

WARIO LAND: SUPER MARIO LAND 3

With Mario nowhere to be seen (brief cameo aside), the third game is almost a standalone title despite the sequel moniker. Wario literally smashes his way through stages, using various helmets to augment his abilities. It's very playable and packed with personality.

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

After the *Super Mario Land* name lay dormant for years, Nintendo resurrected it in 2011 with this title for the 3DS. While the 3D gameplay has little in common with the original series, it's still a fantastic adventure – and a great precursor to *Super Mario 3D World*.



"GUNPEI YOKOI AND DIRECTOR SATORU OKADA COOKED UP A MINIATURISED VERSION THAT RESEMBLED THE NES ORIGINAL IN MOST WAYS"

LAND SPEED RECORD

WE CATCH UP WITH SPEEDRUNNER ADAM FERRARI WHO CAN COMPLETE SUPER MARIO LAND IN A LITTLE OVER 12 MINUTES

What is your speedrun history with *Super Mario Land*?
In June of 2020 I took the speedrunning world by surprise by going from no experience with *Super Mario Land 2* to having the record by the end of July. This opened the possibility of me being good at other *Mario* games. I wanted to be the first person to have the main *Super Mario Land 1* and *2* 'any%' world records since Mugg back in 2013. The record holder at the time was EiP, who is currently in second place. Many of the strategies I learned were from EiP and former record holder Callumbal. When I started on the first game I was unable to grasp the physics. I was definitely not the fastest and it took me some time to get good.

» Speedrunner Adam Ferrari hails from New York. This is his 'failed attempt' face.

How many attempts did it take to achieve the current world record time of 12m 24s?
It took me 1,752 attempts to get the record! In my world record video you can see this number at the top of my livesplit, which is what I use to track the pace of the run after every level. While this seems like a lot, the past couple of world records required 10-20,000 attempts to be set. Efficient practice was the key. I practiced several hours a day for both games when I could.

Some people may be surprised to see you use the screen wraparound glitch (this is when Mario is pushed off the left side of the screen in the auto-scrolling shooter stages and reappears on the right). Is this viewed as a legitimate tactic?
Since the category is simply 'any%', this implies that any glitches can be used, unless the rules say otherwise. The screenwraps can only be done on v1.0 of the game, as it was patched in all other versions. The community sees it as legit without any controversy. I can, however, understand why it is surprising to the public.

Do you think it's possible to get an even faster time?
I estimate there are two to three seconds left to save in theory. I'm proud of my record although I know it will be beaten one day. When it does I most likely will not try to get it back. I stream on Twitch.tv/AdamFerrari for all my attempts, and there are many other projects I find more fun that are higher on my list.

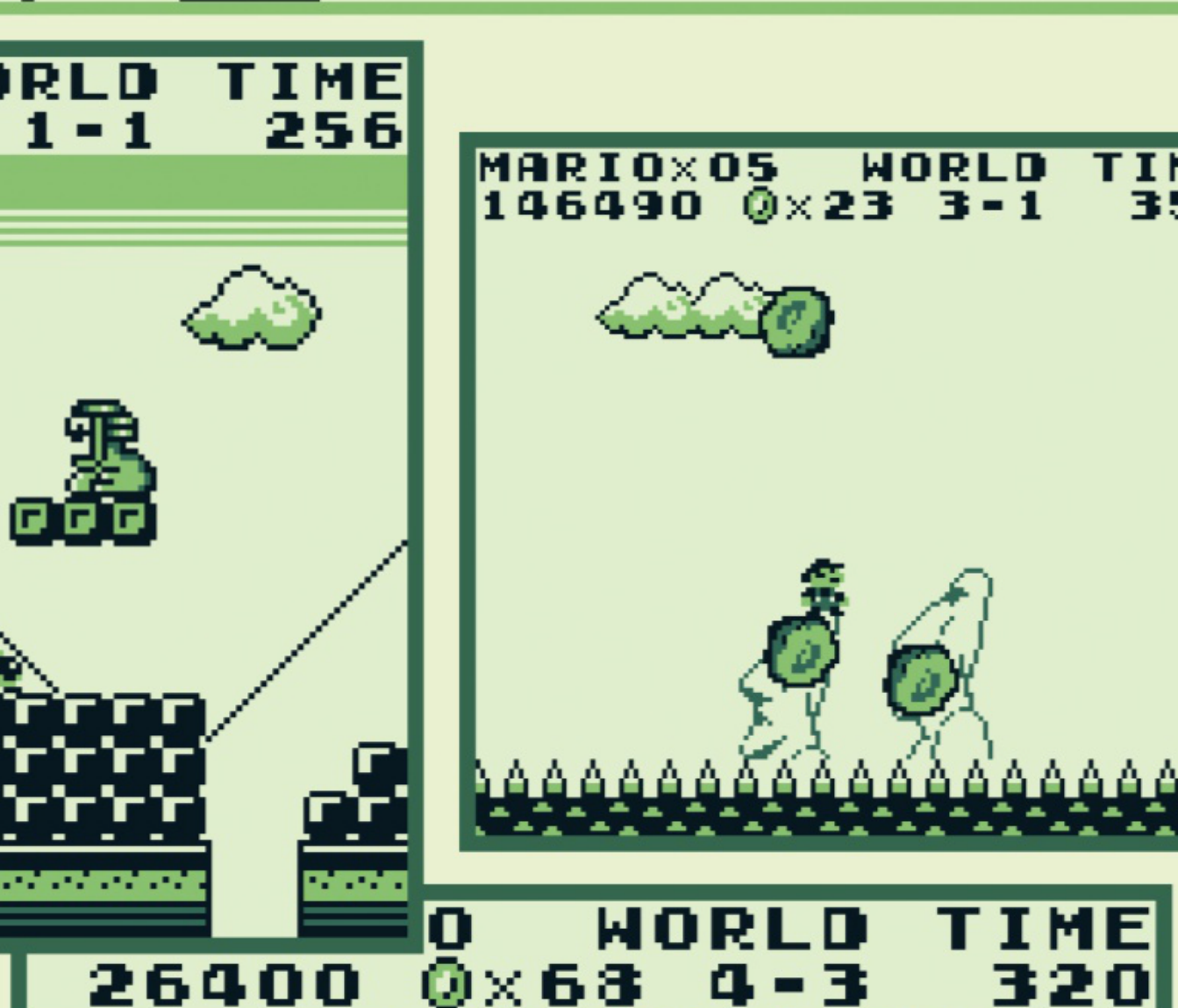
What's your personal opinion on *Super Mario Land* as a game?
I think it's a great handheld experience for 1989. Nostalgia aside, I don't think it holds up well today.

» You can watch Adam's *Super Mario Land* record playthrough and many other speedruns on his Twitch channel.

» [Game Boy] Going underwater in the Marine Pop is far more fun than swimming in *Super Mario Bros.*

▶ shots). The most obvious change is the addition of shoot-'em-up stages featuring the aforementioned vehicles. That's right: in stages 2-3 and 4-3, the game briefly turns into a *Parodius* clone where Mario blasts antisocial octopuses and kamikaze chickens. These stages provide a welcome deviation from the regular platforming, but do they really belong in the *Mario* world?

To this point, we have to remember that when *Super Mario Land* debuted in 1989, there was no such thing as an established *Mario* formula. Outside of Japan, *Super Mario Bros 3* had yet to launch, and the Western *Super Mario Bros 2* was a turnip-throwing impostor wearing Mario's dungarees. So if anything, it's surprising that elements of *Super Mario Land* haven't become baked into the series' DNA over time. It's also worth remembering that the Game Boy was a huge hit around the world, unlike the NES, so there will be a lot of *Mario* fans whose first encounter with the series was *Super Mario Land*. For them it's not unusual or oddball – it's just a great little game packed with fun, charm and invention.



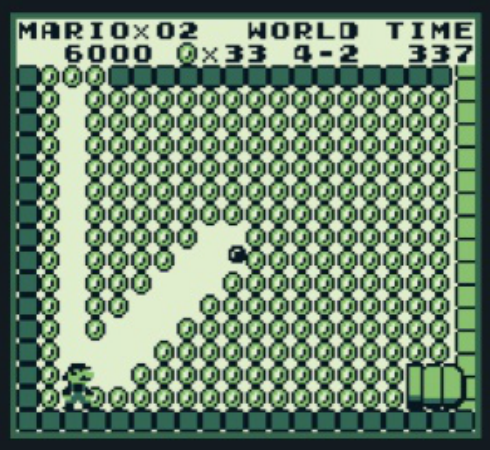
» [Game Boy] Completing the game unlocks Expert mode where the enemies are more numerous and often show up in new places (like this Gao appearing at the end of stage 1-1).

"THE GAME BRIEFLY TURNS INTO A PARODIUS CLONE WHERE MARIO BLASTS ANTISOCIAL OCTOPUSES AND KAMIKAZE CHICKENS"

CVG magazine editor Jaz Rignall knew all about the NES games, but he was still smitten with the handheld version when he previewed it in the July 1989 issue, shortly after its Japanese launch. "*Super Mario Land* is a revamped version of *Super Mario Bros* and has many new features, including a shoot-'em-up section," he wrote. "There are many levels and more hidden features than any previous *Mario* game. It's also unbelievably addictive."

He went on to praise the visuals, maintaining that they worked well on the small, monochrome screen. "The graphics are superb, with a minuscule Mario and brilliant backdrops, all in incredibly tiny detail." There was one concern however. "Scrolling is smooth, but there's a bit of afterblur due to the LCD screen – but it's nothing that impairs the game." *Super Mario Land* was the only launch game to feature fast, full-screen scrolling and therefore highlighted the 'ghosting' effect which was quite pronounced on the original model's LCD screen. There was better news on the ▶

THE LAY OF THE LAND



SUPERBALL SCORE

■ The Superball power-up is great for beating enemies, but because it cannons off objects it's also very useful for collecting coins. For coin rooms like this, the only way you can grab every coin (all 251 of them!) is using the Superball.

LET'S A GO AGAIN

■ The game features no save function, so your progress is lost when you lose all your lives. However, a continue option is awarded for every 100,000 points you score, so try and earn as many points as you can by defeating enemies and collecting coins.

HIT THE SWITCH

■ In classic *Mario* tradition, you can defeat the bosses of kingdoms one and three even if you're small and have no Superball. Just run and jump over them and, providing your timing is perfect, you'll land on a handy kill switch which sees them off.

BONUS BOOM

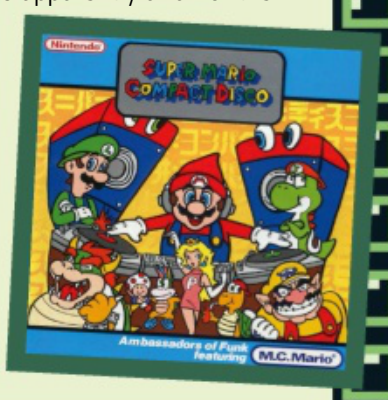
■ In the end of round bonus rooms, you'll notice that the two and three 1UPs always have a single row between them. Always choose this row as the ladder will no doubt appear in your path and you'll walk out with two or three extra lives.

GET THE FUNK OUT

REMEMBERING WHEN MARIO CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE MUSIC CHARTS

■ The pop charts have always attracted novelty hits that spilled over from other media. Remember Zig and Zag? Crazy Frog? Doctor Spin? That last outfit released a dance tune based on the 'Type A' music from the Game Boy version of *Tetris* which scored a number-six hit in the UK in 1992. It was unsurprising then when just a few weeks later, a tune based on *Super Mario Land*'s stage 1-1 music also entered the top ten. This dance remix was masterminded by British pair DJ Simon Harris and rapper Colin Case under the alias Ambassadors Of Funk.

What's perhaps more surprising is that Nintendo UK didn't just approve the release, they loved it – and even provided an actor wearing a comically oversized Mario costume to appear in the music video. Even more amazingly, Shigeru Miyamoto was apparently a fan of the *Super Mario Land* tune and OKed plans for Harris to produce an *entire album* of Mario remixes. This was released in 1993 as *Super Mario Compact Disco*, but only in Japan. If you really need high-tempo *Mario* dance music in your life then don't worry, it's currently available for streaming.

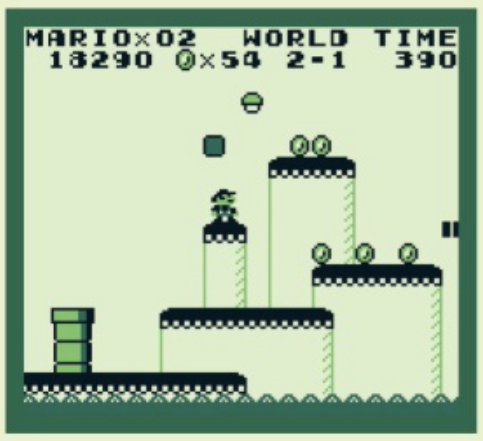


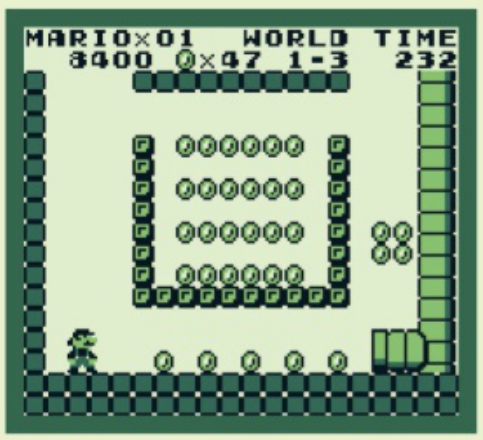
» [Game Boy Color] The Game Boy Color includes a special *Super Mario Land* palette which adds a splash of colour to Sarasaland.

HOW TO MASTER MARIO'S FIRST HANDHELD ADVENTURE

CEILING FAN

■ In some stages (such as 1-3 and 3-2) you may see coins hidden at the top of the screen, out of reach, and wonder how to get them. The trick is to search around for an invisible block which will reveal a handy lift that takes you up to them.





ROKETON

POMPON FLOWER

SUU

» [Game Boy Color] Homebrewed by 'toruzz' in 2019, *Super Mario Land DX* recreates the game using the Game Boy Color's full palette. You can even play as Luigi.

▶ audio side. "The sound is in glorious stereo," wrote Jaz, "and *Super Mario Land* features some great tunes and jingles." It certainly did, thanks to composer Hirokazu Tanaka's delightfully catchy soundtrack. In particular, stage 1-1 features what's perhaps the most familiar and iconic piece of music of any *Mario* game. It even became a top-ten hit single in the UK thanks to Ambassadors Of Funk (see Get The Funk Out).

When *CVG* later reviewed the game it was awarded 93%. *Mean Machines* also posted a positive 90% review, with Matt Regan saying, "This game is guaranteed a semi-permanent place in my Game Boy, along with *Tetris*." The Game Boy version of *Tetris* was a revelation, of course, but it came bundled with the system, so the general consensus was that *Super Mario Land* was the first game you should go out and *buy*. And people did buy it. Lots of people. All told, 18.1 million copies were sold worldwide, which is more than *Super Mario Bros 3* (17.3m) and not far behind *Super Mario World* (20.6m). If you discount *Tetris*, on account of it being mainly sold as a pack-in title, *Super Mario Land* is the single bestselling title for the original Game Boy.

Nintendo was keen to capitalise on this success and a series was born, under the tutelage of Gunpei Yokoi. *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins* was released in 1992 and it marked the debut of Wario, Mario's dastardly alter-ego who has stormed Mario's castle during the events of the first game. This new arch-rival would then take centre stage, starring in *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3* in 1994. Wario would go on to headline many more games, including the trio of *Wario Land* titles released between 1998 and 2001 for the Game Boy line.

"SUPER MARIO LAND IS ONE OF THE FEW CLASSIC MARIO GAMES THAT NINTENDO HAS NOT UPDATED"

As for the original *Super Mario Land*, it's one of the few 'classic' *Mario* games that Nintendo has not updated. It hasn't completely ignored the game however, having included custom colour palettes for it in both the Super Game Boy and Game Boy Color (the enhanced hardware also largely eliminated the ghosting effect). Since 2011, the game has been available for the Nintendo 3DS via the Virtual Console service. For us, this is currently the best way to play the game, on the 3DS' pleasing backlit screen (if you hold down the shoulder buttons and press Y you can even apply the yellow/green screen tint from the original). As with other Virtual Console releases, it comes with a built-in save and restore feature, yet it's not needed as *Super Mario Land* was designed without saving in mind. If you loved the game when it came out you'll breeze through it now in under an hour. You'll discover nothing new in Sarasaland but what you will find is heart-warmingly familiar. ✱

YURARIN

PIONPI

CLASSIC MOMENTS

James Pond 2: Codename: Robocod

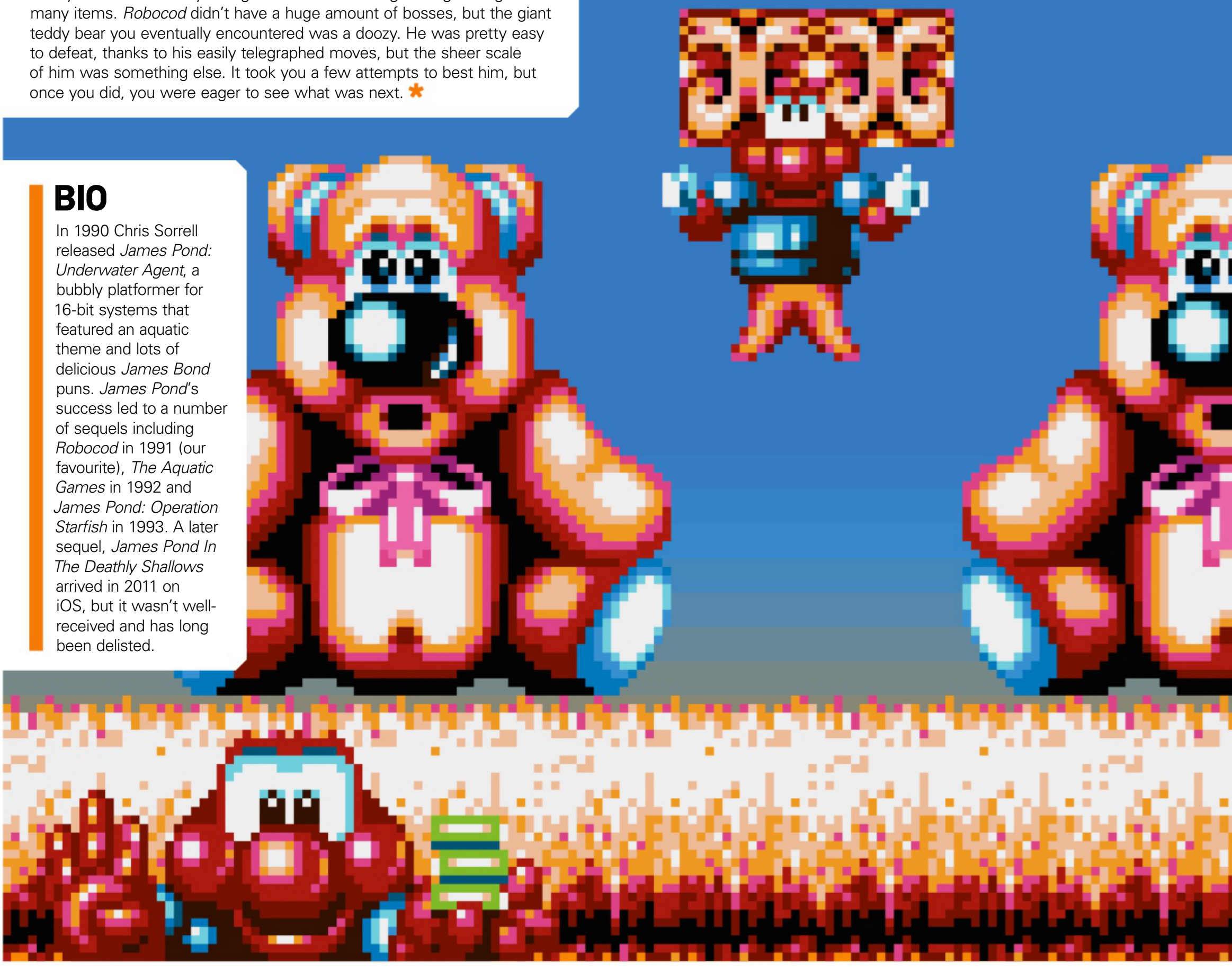
» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA » **RELEASED:** 1991 » **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS SORRELL

You had received Chris Sorrell's *Robocod* for Christmas and had been hugely excited for it. After all, you had really enjoyed James Pond's first outing and this time the puns and the mechanics were being pushed far harder than they were in the original game, with James now able to stretch and also cause damage to enemies thanks to his newly augmented metal body. It was time to play.

You had navigated through the first few stages of the game and were already impressed with the sheer variety that *Robocod* offered. One minute you were using a pair of angel wings to nab an errant penguin, the next you were frantically racing around a bonus stage and grabbing its many items. *Robocod* didn't have a huge amount of bosses, but the giant teddy bear you eventually encountered was a doozy. He was pretty easy to defeat, thanks to his easily telegraphed moves, but the sheer scale of him was something else. It took you a few attempts to best him, but once you did, you were eager to see what was next. ✱

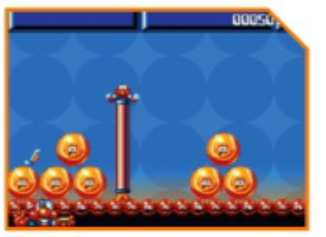
BIO

In 1990 Chris Sorrell released *James Pond: Underwater Agent*, a bubbly platformer for 16-bit systems that featured an aquatic theme and lots of delicious *James Bond* puns. *James Pond*'s success led to a number of sequels including *Robocod* in 1991 (our favourite), *The Aquatic Games* in 1992 and *James Pond: Operation Starfish* in 1993. A later sequel, *James Pond In The Deathly Shallows* arrived in 2011 on iOS, but it wasn't well-received and has long been delisted.



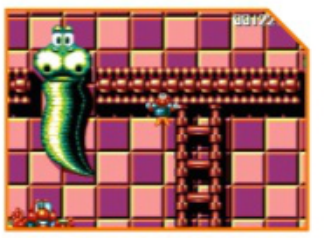
MORE CLASSIC JAMES POND 2: CODENAME: ROBOCOD MOMENTS

A Real Stretch



James' new stretch mechanic is no simple gimmick and is a great way to traverse levels and discover hidden secrets. Best of all, its power seems unlimited and we have often reached the ceilings of some stages with a single activation.

Snakes And Ladders



One of the most inventive levels in *Robocod* sees James navigating a huge number of enormous ladders and cute-looking snakes. You'll certainly need a bit of lateral thinking if you want to grab every item found on the stage.

Saving Santa

Everyone loves a happy ending and *Robocod*'s is a good one. After navigating Santa's huge workshop and seeing off Dr Maybe, James gets to fly off with Santa, after dropping a sack of presents on Dr Maybe's head, naturally.

Vehicular Fun

Although he's pretty nippy for a fish out of water, James still occasionally relies on transport. Our favourite is the plane, as it looks cool and is nice and manoeuvrable. If James gets knocked out of it he'll float to safety via a cute umbrella.

THE MAKING OF PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE

DESIGNER SCOTT KRAGER DISCUSSES THE MAKING OF ACTIVISION'S KILLER ALL-FORMATS PLATFORMER, HOW THE TEAM EXPANDED THE WORLD OF THE ATARI 2600 ORIGINAL, CREATING THE FIRST THIRD-PARTY GAME FOR WINDOWS 95, AND THE TRUE NATURE OF HATMAN

WORDS BY STUART GIPP

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** ACTIVISION
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

It's not particularly surprising that a game as cinematic as *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* was produced by somebody versed in writing for the screen. Activision's Scott Krager graduated in 1990 with a degree in communications, his eye on TV production. While he had been a gamer since the Atari 2600 days, he never pursued it as a career as, "People didn't think about games as a career. They just kind of fell into it. I wanted to work in TV as I liked the nature of something episodic."

Scott landed a job at Paramount, becoming a production assistant on the iconic sitcom *Cheers*, "Which was a great experience," he recalls. "I wrote some spec scripts with David Pavoni, who I met on the show and who also was looking to be a writer. We were lucky and got an agent pretty quickly, which then led to a staff writing role on a Bob Newhart show called *Bob*." When *Bob* ended, Scott found himself on a downswing until his agent informed him that he knew the head of production at Activision, one Alan Gershenfeld. Meeting with Activision in 1993, Scott and David started out as contractors working on a sports title, writing the design doc for an arcade street hoops game.

Sadly, the basketball title was cancelled due to financial issues, "It had been a very fast learning experience," Scott relates. "They were talking about tech, about sprites, and I was asking, 'What is a sprite?'" After the cancellation, Alan informed Scott and David that Activision was bringing back David Crane's *Pitfall!*, the classic platformer from the Atari 2600. Development had already begun and they were looking to grow the team. Having liked the design work they did

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

EARTHWORM JIM: SPECIAL EDITION
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1995

INTERSTATE '76
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1997

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360/ PLAYSTATION 3/WII U
YEAR: 2011

"WE HAD BEEN TOLD IT WOULD BE JUST A FEW MONTHS OF WORK, BUT A YEAR LATER PITFALL WAS STILL A FULL-TIME THING"
SCOTT KRAGER

» [Mega Drive] Harry Jr whips down a bag of stones for his trusty sling. These are plentiful and useful!

» [Mega Drive] You can't tell from stills, but the water effects here are gorgeous.

on the street hoops game, Alan asked Scott and David if they were interested in working on the project. "Having loved *Pitfall!* from my 2600 days, I don't think I could have said 'yes' any faster," Scott says.

Still working as contractors, Scott and David were brought on board the *Pitfall* project as level designers, getting a crash course in the Greg Marquez-created development tool The Ultimate Map Editor, better known as TUME, which had been ported to MS-DOS by Dan Chang. The game's director, John Spinale taught them what they needed to know, and they jumped into designing levels for what became *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*. Naturally, the projected development period ended up expanding somewhat. "We had been told it would be just a few months of work, but a year later [*Pitfall*] was still a full-time thing," Scott says. "David and I were doing double duty, still trying to find a writing gig, but by then it was clear to me that I loved working on *Pitfall* and videogames and David wanted to stick with writing.

The original team consisted of John Spinale, producer Nathalie Deschatres, programmer George Allan, animator Danny Matson, production assistant Sean Vesce and lead tester Tin Guerrero, amongst others. "Sean and I ended up working together again on *Interstate '76*, which he and Zack Norman co-created and I was producer," Scott recalls.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure was influenced by other successful platform games of its era. "*Disney's Aladdin* was a successful mixture of ingredients to create a high-quality platform game, though the original Atari 2600 *Pitfall!* was of course the primary inspiration," Scott explains. While original designer David Crane was not involved in the production of *Mayan Adventure*, Scott notes, "The original game was included out of respect for it." Indeed, buried in one of the early stages is a secret portal that transports you into the iconic flick-screen adventure – signalled by the presence of a scorpion sprite straight out of the original. As development had already begun, John and others had laid out a vision for what they wanted from the new *Pitfall*, wishing to stay true to the spirit of the original game in the things you would encounter – wild animals, deadly traps, dangerous swamps and all manner of other nasties – and the basic feature set – the usual running and jumping as well as athletic climbing and vine-swinging. At the time, Scott had no formal point of reference for how you design game levels. "Knowing what we had from a tech standpoint coupled with raw design instincts from being a fan of the genre we were developing for was the basis of how I approached level design. I leaned into my experience as a huge gamer. I'd played a lot of Genesis games in particular; any time I played SNES it was at a friend's house. I loved and still love action adventure platformers and drew on what I liked about other games in the same genre in terms of pacing, varied mechanics and puzzles, and story."

A level would begin with a layout, drawn onto big sheets almost resembling butcher paper, which would be mapped out as a grid. "I would sketch the rough layout of where I want the player to start and where they would end up, then add in traps, vines, enemies, a boss, a puzzle or even a hidden area," continues Scott. "I even had a cardboard cut-out that represented the player character Pitfall Harry Jr, as I needed to see how Harry could work within each grid and fit into it. It was to keep him in scale to level size. I would use this paper process until I felt like I had something I could begin to work with in TUME, which utilised multiple layers, triggers, enemies, playable surfaces, environment art, parallax scrolling and so on."

The development process could be strenuous but rewarding. "There were some late nights for sure. That was the nature of development. I'm not sure if challenges then were different to now. We had a tight schedule, looking to do a lot and hit all the right quality bars. Every week or two there'd be a bit of a fire, 'How are we ▶

» [Mega Drive] Find the devilishly hidden letters spelling 'PITFALL' for an extra ending screen.

» [Mega Drive] How many bats is too many? Harry Jr here finds out the hard way.

CONVERSION CAPERS

EVERY PORT'S PITFALLS AND HIT… FALLS?

MEGA DRIVE

■ The best of the cartridge versions, Mega Drive *Pitfall* runs smoothly and feels great, let down only by somewhat ugly visuals thanks to its heavy use of the dithering technique often used to create transparencies. Of course, on an old CRT television, it looks absolutely fine.

MEGA-CD

■ This is an excellent version of the game; while it retains the heavily-dithered visuals of the Mega Drive version, it adds two extra levels as well as a brilliantly atmospheric CD soundtrack. Also present, of course, is the customary Mega-CD FMV intro.

32X

■ Boasting re-drawn higher-resolution sprites as well as the extra stages of the Mega-CD version, 32X *Pitfall* should be a shoe-in. Unfortunately, it runs at an erratic, fluctuating framerate that makes it somewhat less appealing of a prospect.

SNES

■ While it looks a little nicer than its Sega counterpart, SNES *Pitfall* just feels a bit off, the control a touch too loose, Harry Jr a little too fast. The music sounds muted as well. Its only major benefit is the SNES controller's shoulder buttons.

WHAT'S YOURS IS MAYAN

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT HARRY JR'S MANY WEAPONS

■ Harry Jr is nothing if not resourceful, with four distinct weapons, each of which are viable in various situations. It's a well-balanced arsenal, a pleasant surprise given how redundant power-ups can become in many other platformers. For starters, there's your default weapon, a sling that can also be used as a kind of whip. It's a somewhat dangerous move, requiring close proximity to enemies, but is useful in a pinch. More practically, however, the same sling can be used to throw rocks at your opponent, keeping you out of harm's reach. Of course, you've got to worry about ammunition, but it's reasonably plentiful if you're attentive to the game's many secrets. There's a charged stone throw attack, too, but it's just not as effective as it could be.

As well as the sling, Harry Jr can throw powerful boomerangs which can be caught on the rebound, allowing them to be reused. This isn't easy to pull off though, so be careful. The final and most powerful weapon is the all-or-nothing Exploding Stone, effectively a smart bomb that hits anything on the screen for a good amount of damage. Naturally these are rare and precious, and best saved for the difficult boss battles.

going to figure this out, what's the difficulty level, this is way too hard, this is way too easy, how are we going to fit this level into the memory?' All the challenges of game development at the time."

The Sega Genesis was the lead platform, but ports of *Mayan Adventure* were brought to almost every system on the market, with Scott producing after finishing the original version in 1994. John and others wanted to make Scott a full-time employee of Activision. "I was still writing, but I loved videogame production just as much so made the choice to make it my career. David and I went our separate ways at this point, but we're still friends to this day."

Activision put Scott straight into production, working on ports for Atari's Jaguar, Sega's 32X and Mega-CD and Windows 95. *The Mayan Adventure* was a Windows 95 launch game, one of the only third-party games in its release

» [Mega Drive] The presence of this Atari 2600-looking scorpion suggests a major secret is nearby.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

■ This is comfortably the worst version of *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, but the GBA effort isn't completely horrible. There is no background music at all, it runs quite choppily and has hideously garish graphics. But at least you can play it on an old GBA with no backlight!

JAGUAR

■ Most reminiscent of the 32X port, retaining its high-res visuals, the Jaguar effort has punchier music than the other cartridge versions and looks pretty great in stills. Unfortunately the framerate here is even worse than the 32X, but at least it's consistently bad instead of fluctuating.

PC

■ By some distance the definitive version, PC *Pitfall* packs the enhanced graphics and extra stages of the 32X version and features a full save system allowing you to quit on any level and return. Best of all, it's all running at an impossibly slick 60fps. Absolute magic.

window. Windows 95 was a huge initiative for Microsoft and the first time that an operating system was marketed towards gamers. Scott elucidated, "That particular port was after the Mega-CD and 32X versions and was by far the hardest, as we were basically developing a port for a platform that wasn't available yet. We'd get updated versions of Windows 95 sent to us during development." The engine behind this PC version – Exodus – was made by a company called Kinesoft, which Activision contracted with to provide said engine, as well as support, and a dedicated programmer named Andrew Glaister was flown over from Chicago. Kinesoft's tech was the basis of how *Pitfall* was able to work in Windows 95, making sure that graphically it was at the high-quality level the team wanted. All the original art assets were upgraded to a higher resolution, combining the enhancements of the 32X and Mega-CD versions with none of their respective drawbacks in order to create the definitive version of the game, even including a couple of extra stages.

One feature of the Windows port that prompted laughter upon recollection was Hatman. Accessed in-game by simply typing in 'hatman', the cheat code transforms Pitfall Harry Jr into… well, Hatman – a bizarre, inexplicable stick figure character with a large 'H' on his stomach. "Hatman was the brainchild of Andy Glaister", explains Scott. "A running gag, a childhood joke perhaps." Hatman was also snuck into the Windows 95 version of *Earthworm Jim*, the team's next project. Additionally, Hatman pops up in the esoteric likes of *Beavis And Butt-Head In Virtual Stupidity*, *Scooby Doo: Classic Creep Capers* and *Slamscape*, amongst others.

Naturally *The Mayan Adventure* was originally designed for a controller, so it was important to make sure the game felt good playing on a keyboard. "Between developing for an unfinished platform, making sure the keyboard controls felt good, and updating all the assets to a higher resolution, Windows 95 was the most challenging port but also the most satisfying because of this, and it was a huge, huge launch – Microsoft went big when promoting Windows 95. We couldn't miss or slip schedule; it was touted as a launch title, so we felt the pressure but were also very excited."

"PITFALL WAS TOUTED AS A LAUNCH TITLE, SO WE FELT THE PRESSURE BUT WERE ALSO VERY EXCITED" SCOTT KRAGER

The launch was great, recalls Scott, "The game reviewed well, and people seemed to like it, enjoying the fact that it carried the spirit of the original game forward. Everyone seemed happy with how it was received." Perhaps oddly given *The Mayan Adventure*'s strong reception, no sequels were planned or commissioned, and Scott was not involved in any of the further takes on the *Pitfall* series going forward, though he continued to work at Activision on projects such as the *Skylanders* toys-to-life series.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure deserves to be remembered not just for its connection to the Atari classic, nor as a pioneering Windows port – it's an accomplished, enjoyable and challenging game that stands up with the very best Western platformers of its era, and when it comes to that genre, believe us – it's a jungle out there. ✱

» [Mega Drive] Tight spaces are no problem for the lithe, athletic yet ruggedly handsome Harry Jr.

» [PC] Here's Hatman in all his glory. We're not too sure of his origins, but he's certainly a neat addition to the PC version.

006440

Rick Dangerous

INDIANA JOKES?

» ATARI ST » 1989
» CORE DESIGN

When I bought an Atari ST in 2014, I looked at it as an opportunity for a console kid to check out some computer classics. I quickly sought out games that were highly rated back in the day, and *Rick Dangerous* was a name that came up often. I was wary, as time spent on Stuart Campbell's forum had told me that it was an irritating, unfair memory test, but could that many reviewers really have been blinded by nice presentation and responsive controls? You may not agree with me, but the conclusion I came to was that they absolutely had. Plenty of the hazards are totally invisible until you trigger them, and even the visible ones are often off-screen when you make your move, or behave inconsistently from room to room.

The whole experience brought to mind a Japanese Flash game I'd played years earlier, *The Big Adventure Of Owata's Life*. To give you an idea of what it's like, the very first screen features a moving platform over a spike pit, and if you jump on that platform the spikes will instantly rise up to kill you. Like *Rick Dangerous*, progress relies heavily on memorising the unfair traps on each screen, but they're often absurd things – if you manage to avoid Guile's Flash Kick as you fall down a pit, you might still die to Zangief diving on you if you take your time at the bottom.

That's what sets *The Big Adventure Of Owata's Life* and similar games like *I Wanna Be The Guy* apart from *Rick Dangerous* – their designers clearly revelled in the absurdity and unfairness of their games, and set out to provide a wide variety of amusing ways to die. Played for laughs, this is the kind of game I can enjoy. Rick's developers were clearly trying to play it straight, but when I play it I feel like the joke is on me.

THE STORY OF LEISURE SUIT LARRY

» Al Lowe's been delighted by the many emails he's received from *Larry* fans in recent years since adding an email link to his website.

» Karin Nestor's wonderfully vivid animations for *Larry* are still impressive today and are ideally suited to the games' quirky humour.

EVER LOOKED FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES? LET US INTRODUCE YOU TO OUR PAL, LARRY LAFFER. OVER THE COURSE OF SIX SIERRA ON-LINE GAMES, WE JOINED THE WOULD-BE LOTHARIO ON HIS QUEST TO FIND THE WOMAN OF HIS DREAMS...

WORDS BY GEM WHEELER

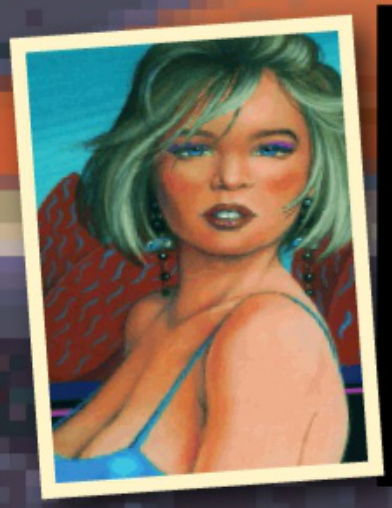
The name's Larry: Larry Laffer. Not quite as resonant as that of another famous womaniser, perhaps – although, funnily enough, four suave men bearing a suspicious resemblance to the pre-Brosnan Bonds can be spotted in *Larry 7*'s casino. And yet, for fans of point-and-click adventure games, Larry needs no introduction.

In his six original adventures for Sierra On-Line (yep, just six: *Larry 4* never did exist, but we'll let Larry's creator, Al Lowe, explain that one later), this man out of time pursues countless beautiful women, outwits nefarious villains, and wears that leisure suit until it comes right round to being fashionable again. No, really, he even wins a best-dressed contest in *Larry 7*…

Larry's adventures begin in 1987 in, you guessed it, *The Land Of The Lounge Lizards*: a long, bright night of the soul in the tawdry

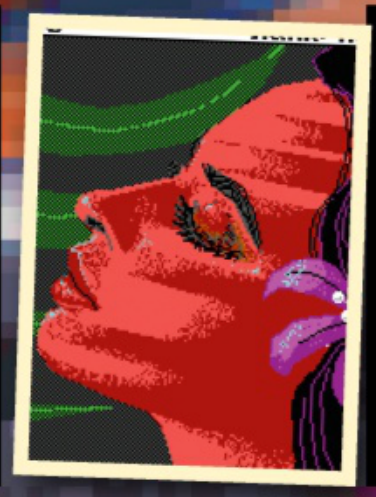
LUCKY LADIES

LARRY'S MISSED CONNECTIONS. BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME, EH?



FAWN

■ You'll bump into the stunning Fawn at the disco in *Larry 1*. This beautiful blonde is big on romance; shower her with gifts and you'll soon be in the chapel of love. This is the first game in the series, though, so don't get too excited.



KALALAU

■ Kalalau is a lovely, innocent local girl from Nontoonyt whose loving embrace seems to be the answer to Larry's prayers in the second game. Sadly, real life intrudes and, as her father oversees the island's corporate desecration, Kalalau gives Larry his marching orders.

TAWNI

■ Beach babe Tawni catches Larry's eye with her topless antics as he recovers from being jilted in *Larry III*. It's not long before you're having your very own *From Here To Eternity* moment in the surf… but do watch out for crabs. Yes, literal crabs.

cityscape of Lost Wages. The following year's *Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking for Love (In Several Wrong Places)* has all the passion and, er, parentheses of a Meatloaf track, as Larry finds, in the arms of the beautiful Kalalau, that the volcanic island of Nontoonyt is misleadingly named. Sadly, trouble soon hits paradise; Kalalau ditches him for her new love, Bobbi, and Larry finds himself single again.

Still, the 1989 release *Leisure Suit Larry III: Passionate Patti In Pursuit Of The Pulsating Pectorals* sees Larry meet his true match in the shape of Patti, a gorgeous jazz pianist who ends up choosing Larry's polyester over the titular, uh, pecs. In the 1991 release *Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does A Little Undercover Work*, Larry's mind – and his happy-ever-after ending – is wiped by the theft of the floppy disks containing *Leisure Suit Larry 4* (so that's where it went). He and Patti are forced to work their way back to each other and defeat an unholy alliance of conservatives and porn barons in the process. Patti gets only a brief mention in the sixth instalment, *Shape Up Or Slip Out!*, which came out in 1993 and takes Larry to the babe-filled environs of the all-inclusive resort, La Costa Lotta. His final Sierra outing, *Love For Sail!* in 1997 takes Larry on-board a cruise ship where the prize for winning its weekly contest is a week in the bed of the redoubtable Captain Thygh…

The man who brought us Larry, meanwhile, has an origin story of his own. Al Lowe started out as a music teacher and taught himself to program in BASIC along the way. He went along to a CUE (Computer-Using Educators) conference with the programs he'd created for the Apple II, thinking it would be a good place to sell his wares ("it wasn't") and was underwhelmed by the state of educational software. Al's plan was to write software that was entertaining first and educational second; he achieved this with titles like 1982's *Bop-A-Bet*, which teaches letter recognition and alphabetisation, and the children's adventure game, *Troll's Tale* (1983).

Buoyed by the success of his programs, Al jumped at the chance to leave the onerous

» [Amiga] And here's where it all begins. Larry needs to get smart to escape this dive…

"I THOUGHT, 'HOW CAN I BE FUNNY ABOUT THIS GUY WHO'S KIND OF A SLEAZEBALL?'"
AL LOWE

» [Atari ST] Game over? Nope – any sudden death can be fixed chez Sierra. Just ask King Graham…

» [PC] John Travolta, eat your heart out. Another man in a white suit rules this dance floor.

PATTI

■ Patti is the closest Larry has to a true love. The plucky pianist is dauntless in her search for the man she adores when his mind is wiped in, as we all vividly remember, *Larry 4*. Patti's career as an FBI agent is quite the trip…

THUNDERBIRD

■ This gym-going temptress has a much longer name, but all the people who called her that are dead. You will call her Thunderbird. Of all the glamorous ladies Larry tries to pull in the La Costa Lotta resort, she's by far the scariest.

DREW BARINGMORE

■ Any resemblance to persons living, dead or very much still working in Hollywood is, of course, entirely incidental. The uninhibited Drew can be found at the cruise ship's nudist pool in *Larry 7*. Keep your eyes where they ought to be, Larry.

» [Atari ST] Biff Barf's game show isn't exactly edifying entertainment, but there are prizes to be won.

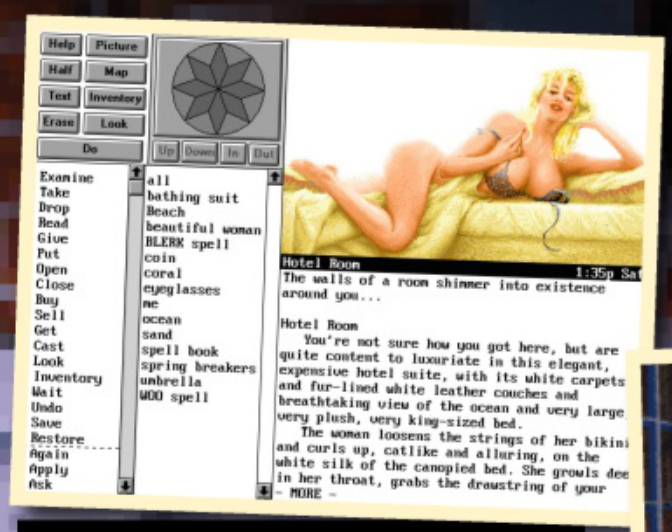
» [PC] Isn't it great when people just, y'know, get you?

"I WASN'T SURE HOW TO MAKE A COMEDY GAME. VERY FEW GAMES WERE FUNNY AT THAT TIME"
AL LOWE

Score: 313 of 500
Rank: Slug
"Welcome aboard, sir!" says the stewardess with her best plastic smile. "May I see your ticket, please?"

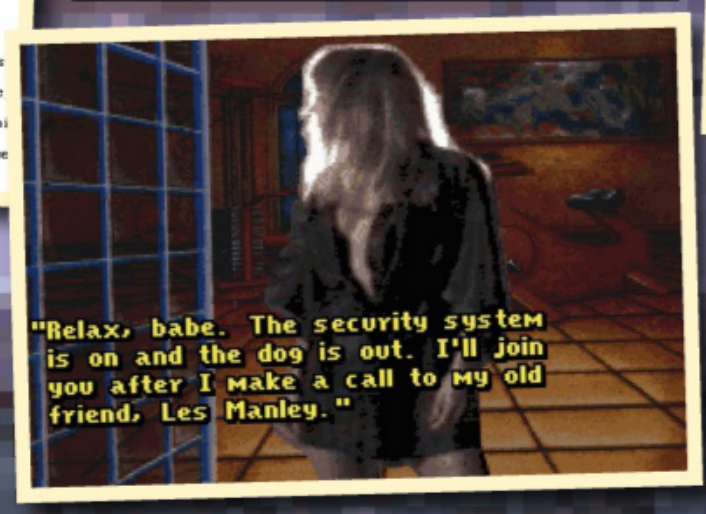
Pixelated Passions

OTHER RETRO ADVENTURES YOU MIGHT WANT TO KEEP FOR AFTER DARK...



SPELLCASTING

■ Steve Meretzky's *Spellcasting* text adventures ladle on fratboy-pleasing raunch as the player embarks on a quest to seduce as many women as possible. Turn on Naughty mode for the full works…



LES MANLEY GAMES

■ Les Manley's two adventures, *Search For The King* and *Lost In LA*, don't scale the heights of early Nineties point-and-click achievement, but they do provide more sleazy fun if you've had your fill of our lounge lizard. They who are tired of Larry are tired of life…

REX NEBULAR

■ *Rex Nebular And The Cosmic Gender Bender*, to give it its full title, was one of MicroProse's relatively rare forays into the adventure genre. It's a tongue-in-cheek, retro-styled adventure with plenty of death scenes. Save early, save often, as the saying goes.

» [PC] Larry's earliest text-based outings use a parser, which was superseded by the SCI icon-driven UI.

work of packing and dispatching games to a publisher. Sierra On-Line made him the best offer, and the rest is history. Al took a leave of absence from his teaching job, but he never returned to the classroom. His wife, Margaret, also a teacher, was able to provide financial security as he united his talents as a musician and game designer to bring Larry into a waiting world.

Sierra On-Line, the adventure-gaming powerhouse founded by Ken and Roberta Williams in 1979, had form in creating erotic adventures. Chuck Benton's 1981 text-based title, *Softporn Adventure*, had raised gamer pulses and even featured Roberta on the cover enjoying a glass of bubbly in a hot tub. Ken Williams wanted to revisit the title and asked Al to see what he thought. Al dug out his pirated copy and delivered his honest opinion.

"I went in and said, 'Oh my god, Ken, this game's so out of touch it should be wearing a leisure suit!' and I got a laugh. I thought, 'Oh, OK, so leisure suits are funny.' On the spur of the moment, I said that the only way I could do a modern-day version of that game would be if they'd let me make fun of it."

Al's a decent sort, and he had a serious point to make. "You've got to understand, this was the height of AIDS," he says. "Nobody knew what AIDS was or how it was spread or what was going on. There were just people dying, right and left. Casual sex, which had been lots of fun in the Seventies, suddenly became life-threatening. That's how I started that game, and you can tell there's a big difference in attitude between the original *Softporn* and *Leisure Suit Larry*."

But where to begin in these early days of adventure gaming? "I wasn't sure how to make a comedy game," Al continues. "There were very few games that were funny at that time. Steve Meretzky had made some for Infocom, which were text-only: *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos* was one of them that I loved. Everything was either save the galaxy or swords-and-sandals."

Larry was the ideal comic protagonist. "I thought, how can I be funny about this guy who's kind of a sleazeball? Rather than making him a hero, I thought, well, the way to do it is to make him the antihero and to mock him. I'm the voice of the narrator, and when Larry did something stupid, I would add a line that told him how stupid he was and that insulted the player. That was new to games – I don't think games had done that before. It was always heroic and positive and so forth, and I was putting the player down for buying the game! I figured out how I could make this a positive: the way to do it would be to make Larry the butt of the jokes, and therefore the women ended up being smarter than Larry… but that was

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS

■ Ol' Gabe gives us a very different brand of eroticism in his first adventure, steaming up New Orleans as he uncovers a voodoo plot. Cheekbones, leather, motorbike… yep, boxes ticked (as for Tim Curry's accent, YMMV). Dean Erickson makes a fine Schattenjäger in the sequel, too.

"Excuse me, but...your eyes are really distracting. I don't think I've ever seen a color quite like that brownish-gold. It's so deep and rich. Man, if I could bottle that, I'd make a fortune."

PHANTASMAGORIA 2

■ The sequel to the controversial *Phantasmagoria* is nothing like its precursor, but its brand of horror and eroticism has attracted a cult following. It also treats its gay and bisexual characters with sensitivity and respect; kudos to creator Lorelei Shannon for getting that far in 1996.

» [Atari ST] Larry's bowled over when he loses his wife, his job and his father-in-law's backing.

literally desperation on my part. I didn't know what I was doing, and I thought, well, I've got to make fun of him somehow."

Al, a talented musician, had scored games before but found the ubiquitous 'techno' tracks of the early Nineties limiting. When it came to shipping the first Larry title, he was determined to ditch the blips and bleeps. "I tried to write a song that was funny, that sounded old-fashioned and dated and out of touch, which is what Larry is," he says. The music is a highlight throughout the series; Mike Dana's moody score for *Larry III* lingers in the mind, while Hollywood composer Craig Safan, whose screen credits include *Cheers* and *The Last Starfighter*, brought a deliciously sleazy verve to Larry's fifth outing.

Innuendoes aside, there's a certain sweetness to Larry and his adventures which lends these games a broader appeal: sexcapades may come (ahem) and go, but Larry's really searching for Ms Right. He's also prone to pratfalls and endearingly awkward: in the fully voiced *Larry 6* and *7*, voice artist Jan Rabson and the sardonic narrator (Neil Ross) bring Larry and his neuroses to vivid life. Al, 15 or 20 years older than most people at Sierra, had a more 'old-fashioned' outlook on life; had this game been entrusted to one of his younger colleagues, we could have ended up with *Sex Quest*. This is Sierra we're talking about, after all.

The agency and strength of the series' female characters has aged well in the main, with Patti as a playable character in *Larry III* and *5*. "I remember being introduced to women at computer shows or press events, and they would say, 'This is Al Lowe – he wrote *Leisure Suit Larry*.' And some woman would say, 'Ooh, that horrible game!' Then another woman would say, 'Hey, wait a minute – have you played the game?' I was being defended by women, which was an odd turnaround." Al warms to his theme. "The sexiest part of my games was always the box. [Marketing director] John Williams created these boxes that looked like, 'Boy, there's some hot stuff inside here!' and then, of course, it was pretty tame." There may not be much actual sex in there, for sure, but the innuendoes would give the *Carry On* crew an attack of the vapours.

Larry animator, Karin Nestor, makes the case for the defence. "I grew up in the Atari age, so I thought it was great that you could put that kind of filthy stuff in a game. I certainly wasn't bothered, and I loved the lewdness of it." She remembers making the games with huge affection. "Al was great. Just the most fun guy to work with. Everything's a joke, and he would always lighten the mood with his comments. He made work meetings a lot more tolerable and just kept the atmosphere of everything on the projects upbeat all the time."

In 1991, the original *Larry* game received a VGA makeover, which, Al notes, was part of a short-lived Sierra trend. "Ken had the idea to reissue the old games to bring them up to modern standards of 256 colours, so we did *King's Quest I*, *Space Quest I* and *Larry 1*, and what we found out was that people didn't care so much about how many colours there were and what the graphics were like; they cared about the stories and the games and the puzzles. The games sold all right, and we kept the sales alive by doing that, but it was just as expensive as creating a new game, and it didn't sell as well as a new game. You'll notice that all those games came out, and then there were no more."

Anyway, seeing as we have Al tied down (so to speak), it's time to uncover the truth. Missing disks, fruitless plans for multiplayer: we've heard all the myths about *Larry 4*'s non-existence, a lacuna so legendary that abandonware site Abandonia pretended to have the floppies as an April Fools gag in 2009. Al lets us into the secret, which is both simpler and funnier. After marrying Larry off to Patti and giving him a glittering career as a game designer in *Larry III*, Al just wasn't sure where to go next.

"The truth is, I had never heard of anything more than a trilogy. I mean, I guess there were series of books – *Hardy Boys*, and *Nancy Drew* – that had dozens of titles, but I was

» [Amiga] You can't keep a good lounge lizard down, jilted or no.

"THE SEXIEST PART OF MY GAMES WAS ALWAYS THE BOX"
AL LOWE

» [PC] The city of angels, where *Larry 5*'s porn empire is based. Funny, that.

Silas Scruemall
"But, we're looking for a woman so over-sexed she'd drop (what's she's doing) for any man, any time, any place, and for any loser, any dork, no matter how lame!

» [PC] Did you hear that, Larry? This might just be your lucky day...

» [PC] In a nice change of pace, *Leisure Suit Larry 5* lets you play as Patti.

Silas Scruemall listens intently and deferentially to the powerful voice on the other end of the line.
You
"First class, of course?"
Michelle Milken
"Yes, and dining isn't the only thing I don't enjoy doing alone!" she responds with a smile.

CANNED LARRY

NOT EVERY LARRY GAME GOT RELEASED...

Leisure Suit Larry 4: The Missing Floppies isn't the only lost Larry adventure. An eighth game, subtitled *Lust In Space* or *Explores Uranus* depending on where you look (and we're trying hard not to look too closely at that second option) ended production after funding was cut in 1998. Al himself, sensing the way the wind was blowing, departed Sierra on 22 February 1999. The planned title got a nod in *Larry 7: Love For Sail!* and was still being considered by Al and his co-writer, Josh Mandel, as late as 2013.

Nokia's N-Gage was meant to have its very own *Larry* title, *Leisure Suit Larry: Pocket Party*, developed by TKO-Software. One of the game's developers, Jody Hicks, has the game's concept art and design document. All we know is that a college-age Larry would have tried to win a cheerleader's heart while braving humiliation by her jock boyfriend. All things considered, we'd rather see Patti back…

2005 was a year for junked Larry games, it seems. *Leisure Suit Larry: Cocoa Butter* (the mind boggles) was a planned sequel to the less than warmly received *Magna Cum Laude*, but it never made it to the shelves.

» [PC] Michelle knows exactly what she wants, and Larry might just be able to provide it…

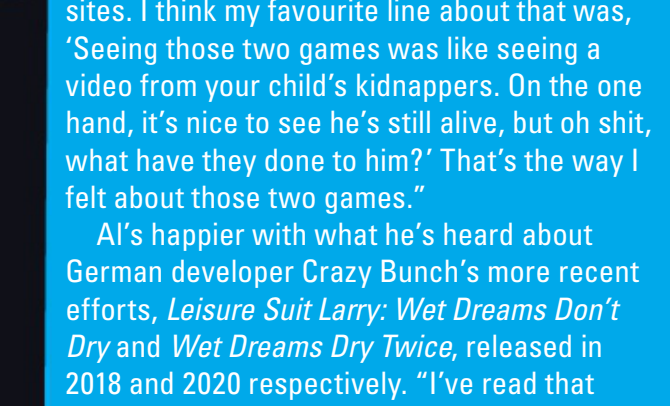
Reviving Larry

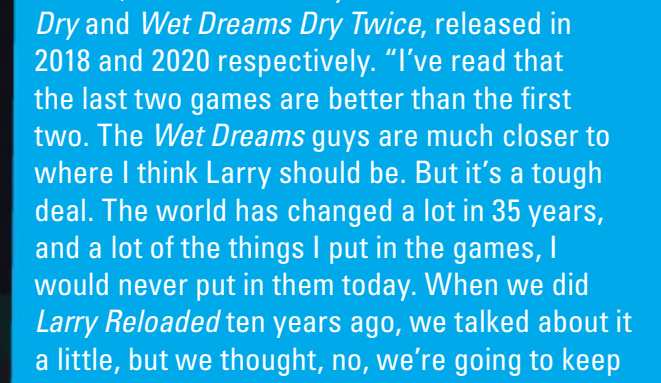
YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD LOUNGE LIZARD DOWN...

Asked about his opinions on the *Larry* games he hasn't worked on, Al gives an answer diplomatic enough to win a round of applause at the UN. "I'm proud of the work I did. How's that?" he deadpans before laughing uproariously.

Vivendi's two games, 2007's *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* and its starry-voiced follow-up, *Box Office Bust* (2009) featured Larry's namesake nephew and were, shall we say, not all they could have been. "The first one was bad, but the second one was just terrible. It was the worst game of the year on many sites. I think my favourite line about that was, 'Seeing those two games was like seeing a video from your child's kidnappers. On the one hand, it's nice to see he's still alive, but oh shit, what have they done to him?' That's the way I felt about those two games."

Al's happier with what he's heard about German developer Crazy Bunch's more recent efforts, *Leisure Suit Larry: Wet Dreams Don't Dry* and *Wet Dreams Dry Twice*, released in 2018 and 2020 respectively. "I've read that the last two games are better than the first two. The *Wet Dreams* guys are much closer to where I think Larry should be. But it's a tough deal. The world has changed a lot in 35 years, and a lot of the things I put in the games, I would never put in them today. When we did *Larry Reloaded* ten years ago, we talked about it a little, but we thought, no, we're going to keep him a guy in the Eighties, it's gonna be about that time and that situation. It's one thing to be a guy ten years out of date, it's another thing to be a guy 40 years out of date."





» [PC] Char really loves her mud baths, but could she love Larry? Don't get your hopes up.

"I THOUGHT IT WAS GREAT THAT YOU COULD PUT THAT KIND OF FILTHY STUFF IN A GAME"
KARIN NESTOR

» [PC] Try working up a sweat in the gym. You could even do some exercise!

» [PC] The new conversation system in *Larry 7* lets you select a variety of different topics.

▶ focussed more on movies, and I couldn't think of a movie that was higher than number three." (Calm down, Trekkies.) "And so, at the end of the game, I took care to tie up all the loose ends, put a bow on it and give it a good ending. The problem was that the game sold like crazy, and the sales team came back and said, 'OK, when's the next one?' and it was like, 'Well, there's not going to be a next one – I've finished it. Didn't you play the game? It's all over!' They convinced me that I was wrong, and there was a market for another game. I sat down to write *Larry 4*, and I had a hell of a time, because I ended the game and he had a good job, he had a good wife and everything was perfect. So, I was having real trouble. I had some ideas for puzzles that I wanted to put in, but I didn't know how to make the game evolve into the next chapter.

"I ran into a woman in the hallway who worked in accounting, and she said, What are you working on now, *Larry 4*? And I said, 'No, *Larry 5*, of course I'm working on *Larry 5* – hey, wait a minute…' And it was literally that smartass answer I gave Liz that changed my goal. Ken wanted to do things that hadn't been done, nobody had ever skipped an entry in their series, and I thought I could put things in *5* that had happened in *4* so people would go, 'What the hell! What did I miss?' It turned into a way that I could weasel out of the predicament that I was in," he says with a laugh.

If Al had his time again, would he change anything about the series? "I'm pretty happy with the stories; I'm disappointed in myself as a game designer, because there were bugs and design flaws I wish I hadn't done that, at the time, seemed like a good idea, but it turned out that no, I should have done that differently. Yeah, it would be nice to be able to go back. When we redid *Larry 1* for the third time (with developer N-Fusion Interactive in 2013), which we called *Leisure Suit Larry: Reloaded*, that game fixed all the problems in *Larry 1*, and we added a new entire level of puzzles, an extra woman to deal with, and I think 5,000 lines of dialogue, most of which are pretty funny. Josh Mandel did a lot of the writing on that game. He used to be a professional comedian and he's a great games designer in his own right, and a funny writer."

Al didn't foresee *Larry*'s success, joking ruefully that he would have negotiated a better contract had he done so. "What we did was end up giving all the rights to the games to Sierra. As long as Ken Williams was in charge, that was okay, we didn't have any problems." That soon changed, though. Sierra was purchased by CUC and CUC became involved in a massive accounting fraud which was discovered in March 1998 (Ken Williams had already left by this point). The scandal saw several CUC members imprisoned for fraud and Roberta would end up leaving Sierra in late 1998 after finishing *King's Quest: Mask Of Eternity*.

It's a depressing story of corporate mismanagement and an ignominious end for a company that had once led the way in adventure gaming. Al remembers Sierra's slow decline. "Have you ever watched an old World War II movie where they shoot the wing of a plane and the plane starts to spiral, and you know there's gonna be no recovery and it's gonna go down and into the deck? That's kind of the way it was. You could see that the wing had been shot off, the wing being Ken and Roberta, and that there was no recovery… they brought in managers who knew nothing about software, who knew nothing about games. It was a sad time – not as sad as for Ken and Roberta, I'm sure, because they started that company on their kitchen table, literally, and built it to over a billion dollars in net worth." He's regretful but resigned to what happened. "I wished I had retained the rights to the stories and characters that I created, but I didn't, and that's the way it is."

Legal rights are one thing; emotional ties are quite another. Al rarely heard from *Larry* fans until he decided to add an email link to his website, and the floodgates opened. He's been touched by the memories players have shared. "Somehow I never put together the fact that behind each of these sales was a human being sitting at a screen for dozens of hours solving these puzzles we had written." He cites one hilarious story with the happiest of endings. "One guy wrote, 'I knew when I played the game with my girlfriend that she was the one because she laughed at *Leisure Suit Larry*! So he married her! I was like, 'Yes!'", Al laughs.

Turns out somebody was looking for love in exactly the right place. Larry as a matchmaker, though? Maybe there's life in the old dog yet. ✱

Hardware Heaven

Mega Drive 32X fact

■ The rarest 32X game is *Surgical Strike*, a CD-based FMV game which was cancelled for North America, but later released in Brazil by TecToy.

PROCESSOR: TWO 32-BIT HITACHI SH2 CPUS (23 MHZ)

GRAPHICS: CUSTOM VDP (UP TO 32,768 COLOURS, 3D POLYGON GRAPHICS, ADDITIONAL SPRITES, MEGA DRIVE OVERLAY/UNDERLAY)

AUDIO: QSOUND STEREO PWM (2 CHANNELS, MIXED WITH MEGA DRIVE AUDIO)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 8MB), CD-ROM (OPTIONAL VIA MEGA-CD)

RAM: 256KB MAIN SDRAM, 256KB VIDEO DRAM

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Mega Drive 32X

» **MANUFACTURER:** Sega » **YEAR:** 1994
» **COST:** £169.99 (launch), £250+ (today, boxed), £150+ (today, unboxed)

At the beginning of 1994, the console market had been shaken up by the arrival of the Atari Jaguar and 3DO, and Sega's top brass were feeling the heat. With the Saturn unlikely to arrive in the lucrative North American and European markets until 1995, a 32-bit upgrade module for the Mega Drive was rushed into development for the end of the year. The mushroom-shaped device offered enough additional grunt to significantly enhance 2D games and even run basic 3D games.

After a strong initial triumvirate of *Doom*, *Star Wars Arcade* and *Virtua Racing Deluxe*, 32X games were routinely just enhanced versions of their Mega Drive counterparts. Developers were also more interested in the truly revolutionary consoles on the way, including one from Sega itself. Players had already seen this situation play out with the Mega-CD and also knew that the Saturn was on the way, leading to a lack of confidence in the stopgap device. The 32X ended up as a costly flop, with just 40 games released worldwide – 34 on cartridge, and six which required the Mega-CD as well. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME
Star Wars Arcade

It's not the deepest *Star Wars* experience ever, but this arcade conversion does capture the thrills of shooting down TIE Fighters and the Death Star trench run. *Virtua Racing* and *Doom* have since received better console conversions – in *Doom*'s case, even an improved 32X port – but this is the only official way to play this Model 1 game at home. Between the licensing situation and Sega's current lack of interest in the 32X, it's unlikely that either the arcade or home versions will be brought back to market soon.

THE MAKING OF VECTOR

THIS IS THE STORY BEHIND SEGA'S ANSWER TO DONKEY KONG COUNTRY AND HOW BLUESKY SOFTWARE GOT THE CHANCE TO FINALLY MAKE ITS OWN ORIGINAL ACTION PLATFORMER INSPIRED BY TREASURE'S GUNSTAR HEROES. LEARN HOW VECTORMAN KNOCKED THE SOCKS OFF OF MEGA DRIVE FANS AND DEVELOPERS ALIKE

WORDS BY LD MURPHY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** BLUESKY SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **GENRE:** ACTION PLATFORMER

The heyday of the Mega Drive was also the high-water mark of the prolific California-based developer BlueSky Software. BlueSky made a name for itself in the early Nineties as a mercenary studio of sorts that publishers turned to when they needed a game done right. Electronic Arts reached out to BlueSky to translate its landmark 1986 space sandbox PC game *Starflight* to the Mega Drive in 1991 and Sega personally enlisted the team with squeezing 1993's blockbuster hit *Jurassic Park* into a videogame cartridge mere months after the film's release. This might paint the picture of grizzled veterans taking on projects nobody else dared to, but the studio largely consisted of young kids who were simply excited to be working in the industry. Nevertheless, that didn't stop them from yearning for more. BlueSky alumni Jason Weesner admits, "We were super excited to be working on all this stuff. It was really cool, but we also had aspirations to work on our own thing, [to] come up with our own idea and pitch it."

The team finally got the chance they were looking for via a combination of ingenuity, tenacity and luck.

The earliest stage of the project could be traced back to the work of two of BlueSky's brightest programmers, Karl Robillard and Rich Karpp. Karl came from the ever-innovating Amiga demo scene which came in handy as the Mega Drive used the same Motorola 68000 microprocessor as the Amiga. Meanwhile, Rich knew the ins and outs of the Mega Drive like the back of his hard. They made for an impressive team and together pushed the limits of what the Mega Drive could do. Eventually Karl coded a means of animating spheres in 3D space that looked stunning on Sega's 16-bit console,

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STARFLIGHT
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1991

JURASSIC PARK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

SHADOWRUN
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994

» [Mega Drive] Vectorman juggles the orbs in his arm joints waiting for the player to do something.

» *Vectorman* co-creator and co-designer Jason Weesner enjoying a road trip alongside his loyal pooch Bebe.

» Mark Botta joined *Vectorman*'s programming team yearning to push the Mega Drive to its limits.

» *Vectorman* was lucky to have a truly inspired animation department with Marty Davis in charge.

» The team parades Ellis Goodson's contributions as he's much too humble to do it himself.

MAN

but scarcely taxed its hardware. The pair decided to include the tech in an upcoming *X-Men* game BlueSky was working on. It was planned for the mutants' Danger Room where Professor Xavier would've used his powers to create surreal obstacles for players to overcome. However, the rug was pulled out from underneath their feet when Sega suddenly took the licence back and instead gave it to Headgames.

It was a bitter pill to swallow, especially since BlueSky had loyally developed many successful titles for Sega up to that point, but it was actually a blessing in disguise. Without a game to work on, the team had time to come up with their own original title, and furthermore, they had a fascinating new piece of tech to use in it. Rich, Karl, artist Mark Lorenzen, and budding designer Jason Weesner joined forces and began brainstorming away. But it quickly became clear that inspiration wasn't simply going to land in their laps. Jason concedes, "We decided if we were going to come up with something brand-new [that] we were really excited about, [then] we really needed to be inspired in a big way. And we all agreed that we were not going to be very inspired if we sat around the office."

> "GUNSTAR HEROES IS SUPER COOL. EVERY LEVEL HAS SOMETHING CRAZY THAT HAPPENS, SO WE THOUGHT, 'IF WE HAVE A BUNCH OF NEAT TRICKS THAT WE WANT TO TRY OUT, WHY DON'T WE DO THE SAME THING?' THAT WAS OUR DESIGN GOAL WITH VECTORMAN"
>
> **JASON WEESNER**

They switched things up by jumping in a car and driving out somewhere new in their hometown of San Diego over the next few weeks. Energised from these excursions away from the office as well as the junk airing on TV, they came up with the theme for their game: 'kill your television'. The hero of their newest creation would gather all of ▶

» [Mega Drive] Getting the Sludge Barge boss' sprite to tilt right was tough, but paid off.

VECTORMAN VERSION 2.0

HOW BLUESKY'S HERO WAS UPDATED FOR THE SEQUEL

Although *Vectorman* was released late into the Mega Drive's lifespan, months after the launch of the Sega Saturn in the West, it was still successful enough to warrant a sequel, at least in North America. Jason was brought back for *Vectorman 2* and immediately went to work on improving and expanding upon Vectorman's transformation abilities from the first game. The helicopter and tornado forms returned alongside new transformations of Vectorman on rollerblades, as a tank and even a spaceship. Furthermore, the sequel's insectoid foes could drop Assimilation Icons which allowed Vectorman to temporarily take on buggier forms, including the stinging scorpion, charging rhino beetle and mighty tick.

Marty also returned to work on the sequel as well. For his part, he endeavoured to give the titular hero even more attitude than in the first game. "People really responded to the personality of Vectorman, especially the personality expressed in his idles. So in *Vectorman 2* I tried to bring a little more of that personality into his other animations like the roller-blading [transformation], where I tried to give him a kind of playful, swingin' attitude." Likewise, Vectorman's voice was reworked to be clearer and deeper, which greatly helped as the hero became much more talkative in his second game.

» [Mega Dive] The sequel opens with a pre-rendered Vectorman jamming out to composer Jon Holland's soundtrack. Radical.

» [Mega Dive] Vectorman lashes his tail out to sting an unwitting foe with his scorpion morph.

their power-ups by destroying televisions spread throughout the game. Moreover, the main antagonist, Raster, would use televisions to spread its propaganda. Once it became obvious that the game would have a science-fiction setting, the crew agreed to make the hero a robot made of orbs, or 'Orbot' for short. This was partially due to the team's love of Japanese sci-fi movies and anime which was filled to the brim with mechs and robots, but it was a practical decision as well. "We had this technology [that'd] make a robot look much better than an alien or a person," Jason says.

With the theme and setting settled the next hurdle was figuring out the gameplay. The team found themselves searching for inspiration once again, but this time in the form of many of their favourite Mega Drive games including *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, *Ranger X* and *Rocket Knight Adventures*. But one developer stood head and shoulders above the rest in their eyes – Treasure Co, Ltd. "We totally loved Treasure, we worshipped Treasure," Jason gladly proclaims. They adored *Dynamite Headdy* and *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*, but they were especially influenced by *Gunstar Heroes*. "*Gunstar Heroes* is super cool, but it also feels like

» [Mega Drive] Vectorman's fish form allows him to swim circles around Sega's other mascot.

MEGA OVERDRIVE

VECTORMAN WASN'T YOUR TYPICAL MEGA DRIVE GAME, IT PUSHED SEGA'S 16-BIT CONSOLE TO ITS LIMITS

SPRITE OVERLOAD

The Mega Drive can only display a set number of sprites on any horizontal line. To get around this the team used a sprite cutter program to chop up frames of animation into numerous sprites. These were then adjusted by hand as they were put into the game to ensure they never overtaxed the hardware.

SHOCKING LIGHTING

Vectorman includes various lighting effects. The hero's blaster and Boost Boots cast flashes of light across his body. In darker areas Vectorman's body is shadowed outside of his glowing eyes and joints. One of the most electrifying effects can be found within Level 12's Nightscape which takes place in a thunderstorm.

VECTOR & SILICON

BlueSky invested tens of thousands of dollars into purchasing cutting-edge Silicon Graphics workstations. The team didn't end up using the computers in *Vectorman* as much as they initially planned, but various 3D models can still be found in the game, such as the debris that flies around in the impressive tornado stage.

the development team is showing off." Jason says, "Every level has something crazy that happens, so we thought, 'If we have a bunch of neat tricks that we want to try out, why don't we do the same thing?' That was our design goal with *Vectorman*."

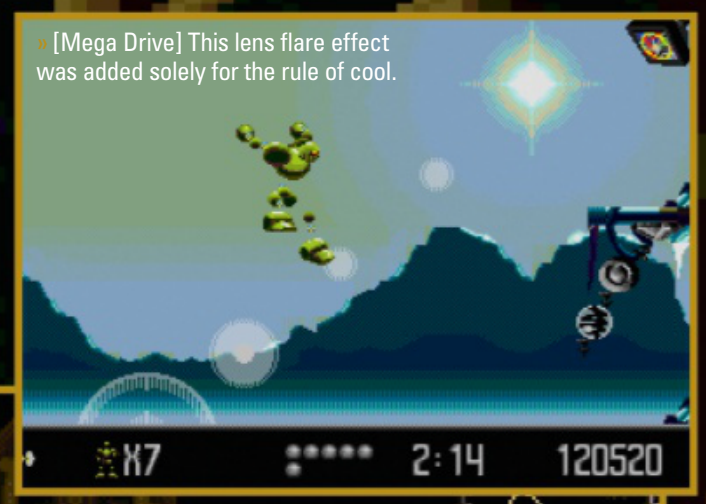
This directly inspired the boss rounds, such as the dizzying swinging train level or the cat-and-mouse scrolling tablecloth stage. "We would come up with a technical hook first and then we'd come up with a transformation [for Vectorman] after that. That's why all those bonus rounds have special transformations," Jason explains. These proved to be a headache to create though as each boss round features new art and gameplay that is never seen elsewhere in the game. Programmer Mark Botta recalls, "The boss fights were the toughest part of the game to get right. Each one was unique and presented different challenges." Regardless, it was all worth it. After all, the team hoped *Vectorman* would define both BlueSky Software as well as their own careers. They dreamed of earning a spot on the same pedestal as their heroes over at Treasure, beloved and respected by fans and fellow game designers alike.

> "WE WOULD SELECT INSTRUCTIONS AND REARRANGE CODE TO MINIMISE CLOCKS AND MAXIMISE EFFICIENCY. WE WERE PUSHING THE [MEGA DRIVE] TO ITS LIMITS."
> **MARK BOTTA**

Jason worked closely alongside Karl, Mark Lorenzen, and Rich planning out gameplay mechanics, bosses, level themes and so on. Meanwhile, more of BlueSky's staff was brought onto the project as the game moved out of preproduction despite that it hadn't secured a publisher yet. That all changed when representatives from Sega Of America came down to visit BlueSky's offices to assign more sports and licensed games to the studio. Rich and Mark Lorenzen convinced BlueSky president George Kiss to show *Vectorman* to them right then and there. The project was still very early on in development at this point, in fact the team finalised the name of the protagonist (with Vectorman beating out Shakesphere after an intense debate) within the last week or two. Nonetheless, the timing couldn't have been better. "The thing that we had working for us that we didn't quite know was that *Donkey Kong Country* was about to come out, Jason recalls. "The guys from Sega saw what we had and said, 'Hey, here's our *Donkey Kong Country*!' I don't think

» [Mega Drive] The rivet in Clockwork's wheel was cleverly added to make the rolling effect really pop.

» [Mega Drive] The enemy roster isn't limited to mechanical creations. Check out this bear of a boss.



» [Mega Drive] This lens flare effect was added solely for the rule of cool.

» [Mega Drive] Jason tried to pick more unusual level themes. Case in point with the Bamboo Mill.

ONE-UPPING MODE 7

■ Level 2 stage Metal Head features a visual trick that gives the SNES' Mode 7 a run for its money. Vectorman trains along a track suspended miles above the ground below as Raster jumps up and climbs along the track to take the hero out. In the meantime, the camera swings left and right to really sell the effect.

OUT-VECTORING VECTORMAN

■ While many of *Vectorman*'s bosses are spectacles to behold, the most impressive of the lot is arguably Acrobat. These four little vector creatures fluidly combine together in wildly imaginative forms in ways that put Vectorman's own transformations to shame. Marty lists it among his proudest achievements.

» [Mega Drive] Hop around quick and don't get squashed by Raster's iron fists on the bamboo table.

» [Mega Drive] Vectorman's buggy transformation allows him to zip around crashing through enemies and walls alike.

» [Mega Drive] One of the more bizarre enemies includes Ellis' killer mechanical fire extinguisher.

Vectorman would exist [without] *Donkey Kong Country*."

It wasn't plain sailing, though. While the team loved the idea of Vectorman consisting of a bunch of balls (even if it did take a number of weeks to get over all the giggling and wisecracking), they struggled to translate it to the screen. That's when Marty Davis was brought into the fold to help get the game on the right track visually. Marty recalls, "They'd kinda gone with more of a kids' style with a big head and a small body, like Mickey Mouse proportions all done in balls. They asked if I could take a crack at it."

However, rather than try to redesign Vectorman, Marty looked back at Mark Lorenzen's earlier sketches of the character. They were bold, heroic and, to Marty at least, looked better. He booted up Karl's Amiga-based Vector Animation Tool, aka VAT, which the team used to animate the characters in-game, and got to work. The Vectorman we know today ultimately came together from Marty's work within VAT and the sketches of BlueSky artist Rick Schmitz and artist/animator Ellis Goodson.

The VAT program turned out to be a godsend for Marty and his small team of animators. The Mega Drive's hardware allowed developers to set the priority, or layer, that sprites were displayed to ensure things like character sprites appearing in front of background sprites. VAT took this a step further, giving the animators the ability to assign individual elements of sprites themselves to different layers as well. This created the illusion of 3D depth as characters' body parts naturally overlapped another depending on how they were facing. Marty notes, "It's just a cut-out animation where you're just popping one thing in front of the other, but you could do clever things [with it.]" Another even more impressive feature was VAT's ability to generate in-betweens from keyframes. Traditional animators usually draw a frame at the beginning of a motion and another at its conclusion. These keyframes become a reference guide as animators then painstakingly draw every step between them, known as in-betweens, to make the motion look smooth and natural. VAT skipped this busywork altogether by calculating the in-betweens from the keyframe data. Of course, the process wasn't perfect, typically requiring fiddling and the inclusion of more keyframes during the movements to get just right, but it still saved a vast amount of time. It also created more frames of animation than what would be feasibly possible for an animator to draw, making each movement silky smooth, especially for its time. On top of that, the frames were calculated computationally in real time solely from the keyframe data which didn't hog up the game's limited memory space with tons of individual frames of animation. In short, they looked great, were quick to make, hardly cost any data, and ran as smooth as butter within the game's 60fps engine. As animator Ellis Goodson puts it, "It was good times. Probably one of the best jobs a guy could have."

With VAT at their side, the animators spent a great deal of time smoothing out each animation and ensured that transitioning between them was quick and organic. But they also had fun with it too, cramming Vectorman full of numerous idle animations – a stylish move at a time when 16-bit characters rarely had more than one. Marty reminisces, "You were so tight for space, you really had to make trade-offs to make room for everything. To trade out some other little animations, characters, or whatever for idles was a statement. People would say, 'This company's so cool and so under control they can even burn three pretty elaborate animations on various idles.' That was always a big thing." It was just yet another way the team hoped to knock the socks off the industry.

Although, none of this would have been possible without the tireless work of the programming crew. They used every trick in the book to optimise the game – literally. "I had a small booklet that listed the clock cycle count of every instruction on the Motorola 68000," Mark Botta continues. "We would select instructions and rearrange code to minimise clocks and maximise efficiency. Shaving off a few cycles here and

» [Mega Drive] The helicopter form helps Vectorman collect as many photons as possible on his descent.

» [Mega Drive] Marty and Ellis worked hard to get the zany swinging monkey boss just right.

"OF ALL THE PROJECTS I'VE DONE IN VIDEO GAMES VECTORMAN WAS THE BEST AS FAR AS [A COLLABORATIVE] EXPERIENCE"
MARTY DAVIS

there really added up. We were pushing the [Mega Drive] to its limits." Likewise, the animators utilised cuts and cheats wherever possible. "Pieces [that were] already accounted for in the memory budget were sometimes given new palettes to hide the repetition," Ellis confesses. "For instance, the Sludge Pilot [was made] just using [recoloured] Vectorman pieces."

Looking back, everyone had the fondest regards for *Vectorman*. "I was super proud of everybody on the team," Jason states. "It was a blast to be able to pick up a controller and play it. That's an unparalleled feeling when you see something that [you] came up with and people are [now] playing it. I'm [also] proud that I stood up for my ideas. So much of [*Vectorman*] is so personal in terms of my own contributions and [others] that it's just cool to look at it as a snapshot of my life."

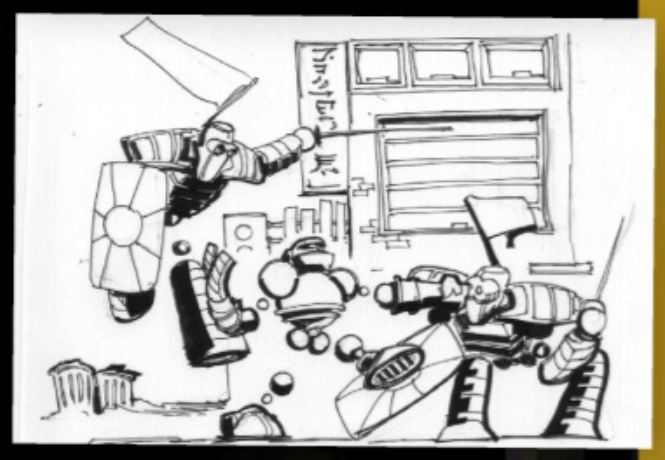
Marty was delighted by what they achieved with the Mega Drive's hardware. Still, that played second fiddle to his memories of working alongside the team, "I really like the creativity that we employed to meet the challenge. Of all the projects I've done in videogames *Vectorman* was the best as far as [a collaborative] experience. Where with every layer there was a new layer of creativity and contribution. It's not like I did it. It's cool that we did it. It was a great team effort. I loved working with [everyone] on the team." Mark Botta cherishes his memories of stepping outside of his programming duties and contributing to the level design, "I am oddly proud that it's possible to collect every TV in the game. I made a point to go through every level and collect every TV. I moved any I found that couldn't be collected [in a single run], and adjusted all of them to keep the flow through the level nice and fast." Finally, everyone was immensely grateful that they were able to work on a game where they were given free rein to go wild creatively and truly make it their own. It was a dream come true. As Ellis puts it, "*Vectorman* was a roll of the dice that came up seven."

VECTORMAN'S LOST ADVENTURES

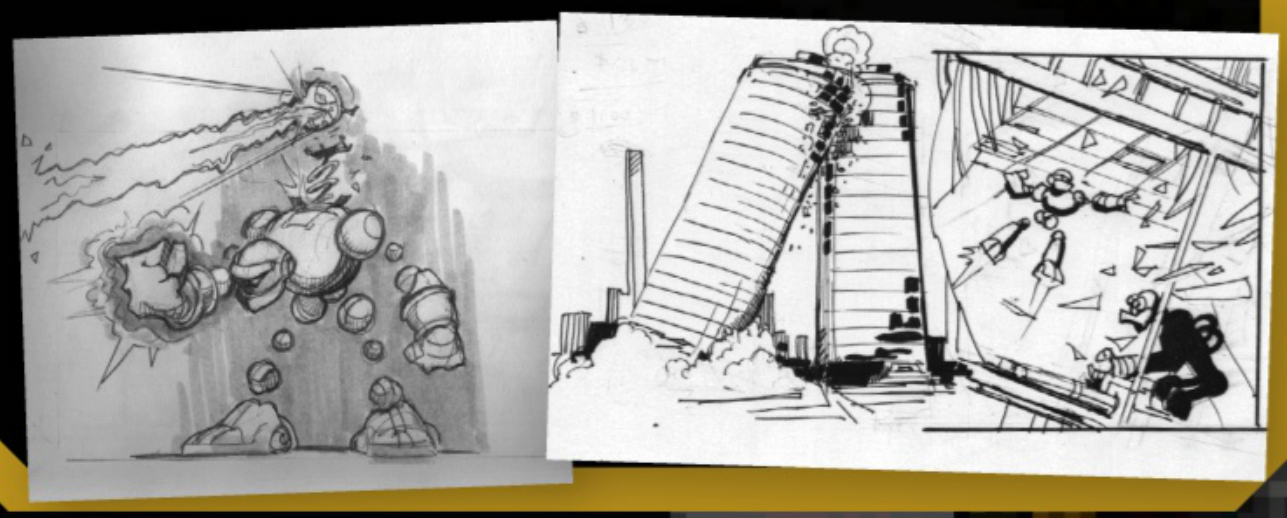
THE VECTORMAN 3S THAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Jason was involved with two separate attempts (and skirted with a third) to make a proper *Vectorman 3*. The first project was born after Sega swung by BlueSky's offices to show off the Saturn leading up to its release in the West. It let Jason play Saturn games such as *Astal*, *Clockwork Knight* and *Panzer Dragoon*. Inspired by what the next generation of gaming had to offer, Jason went all in crafting a thoroughly detailed design document with Ellis Goodson providing dozens of concept sketches. The game was dubbed *Vectorman Ultra*. However, by the time the duo was ready to pitch it, BlueSky dissolved its relationship with Sega leaving the project dead in the water.

Later around 2000, Jason, Karl, producer/engineer David Kunkler, and engineer Mike Acton all left BlueSky to start their own development studio called VBlank (no relation to VBlank Entertainment of *Retro City Rampage*). With a powerful original engine under their belt, they approached their old friends at Sega looking for work. Sega sent them a list of properties they were interested in reviving which included *Vectorman*. The team quickly made a playable demo called *Vectorman Neo* that featured the hero exploring an alien planet. However, when they presented it to Sega the publisher changed its tune, turning its nose up at a property that supposedly, "Didn't have any name recognition."



Ironically, just a few years later at E3 2003 Sega unveiled yet another *Vectorman 3*, this time from Pseudo Interactive. Jason was shocked and tried to reach out to the team about the new PS2 game, but he was quickly shut down. It wasn't a huge loss however as Sega did the same to the game shortly afterwards, leaving three separate *Vectorman 3* projects in the grave.



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Strikers 1945

1942 ON STEROIDS

» SATURN » 1996 » PSIKYO

I've often mentioned how my Japanese Saturn collection kicked off when I purchased a This Is Cool Saturn with 28 shmups from shmups.com. The £500 bundle had some incredible shooters in it, including *Batsugun*, *Radiant Silvergun*, *Twinkle Star Sprites* and *Hyper Duel*, but the game that received most of my attention at the time was *Strikers 1945* and its sequel, which was also part of the bundle.

While the likes of *Radiant Silvergun* and *Twinkle Star Sprites* are far more exciting mechanically than *Strikers 1945*, it's Psikyo's game that I've played the most and it's probably because it reminds me of a supercharged version of Capcom's *1942*, a game I loved playing back in the Eighties and on my friend's Spectrum.

Like *1942*, *Strikers 1945* has a World War II theme, but unlike Capcom's game it's far more fantastical in its approach. There's a good range of real-life planes to choose from, some impressive backgrounds to fight over and a fairly decent scoring system, but the main draw of *Strikers 1945* is its insane boss fights.

See, in this alternative take on Earth's history, World War II has ended and a new organisation called CANY is recruiting high-ranking military officers from all over the world to enslave it. CANY has assembled some gargantuan robotic weapons to help with this and it's your job as part of the Strikers team to take them down.

I don't really care much for the story behind *Strikers 1945*, but I do care when it comes to filling giant robots with hot plasma and Psikyo's game certainly allows you to do that. Seeing weapons of war transform into immense mechs never gets old and neither does blowing them to pieces. Interestingly, I also own Psikyo's game on a Switch collection, but for some reason it's the Saturn version that I always go back to. ✱

THE MAKING OF Mr. DRILLER

IN THE KNOW

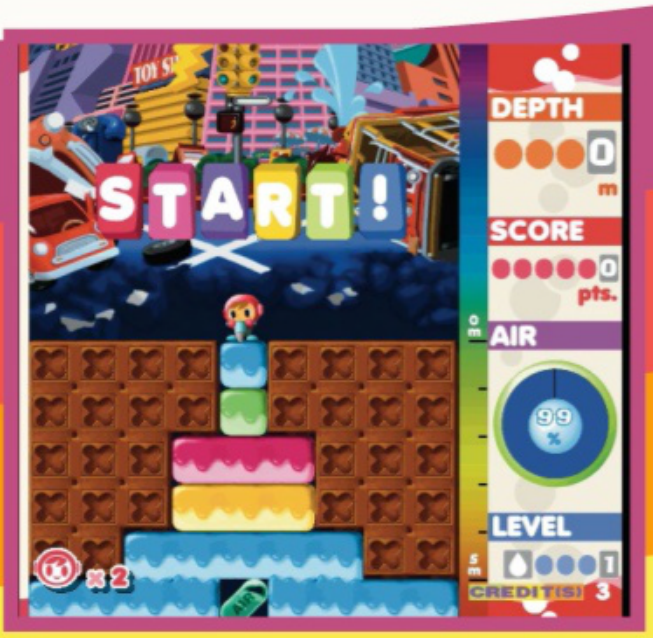
- **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE

NAMCO'S UNIQUE ARCADE GAME MIGHT BE BEST DESCRIBED AS 'W HAT IT'S LIKE TO BE INSIDE TETRIS' BUT, AS PRODUCER HIDEO YOSHIZAW A EXPLAINS, ITS TRUE INSPIRATION W AS A W ORLD AW AY FROM THE ORIGINAL BLOCK-DROPPER

W ORDS BY ASHLEY DAY

With budgets in the tens of millions of dollars, 100-plus-sized teams and three-to-five-year development cycles on today's biggest videogames, it takes a brave company to start work on an idea without careful planning, market assessment and prototyping in advance of full development. Yet great games are occasionally developed in secret, built up to a certain level before they're shown to the managers of a studio for approval… games that might not sound much fun from a mere description, but turn out to be supremely playable once you get your hands on them. It's a fact that we're sure Hideo Yoshizawa would agree with, after the team behind 1997's *Klonoa* surprised him with an idea involving falling blocks of dirt and a little guy with a drill while he was still working at Namco (he left to go freelance in 2016).

» [Arcade] *Mr Driller* is set in the year 20XX. A reference to *Mega Man* perhaps? "We've never even thought of that before now," admits Yoshizawa.



» [Arcade] Miss an air capsule in *Mr Driller* and you might as well quit the level and start again.

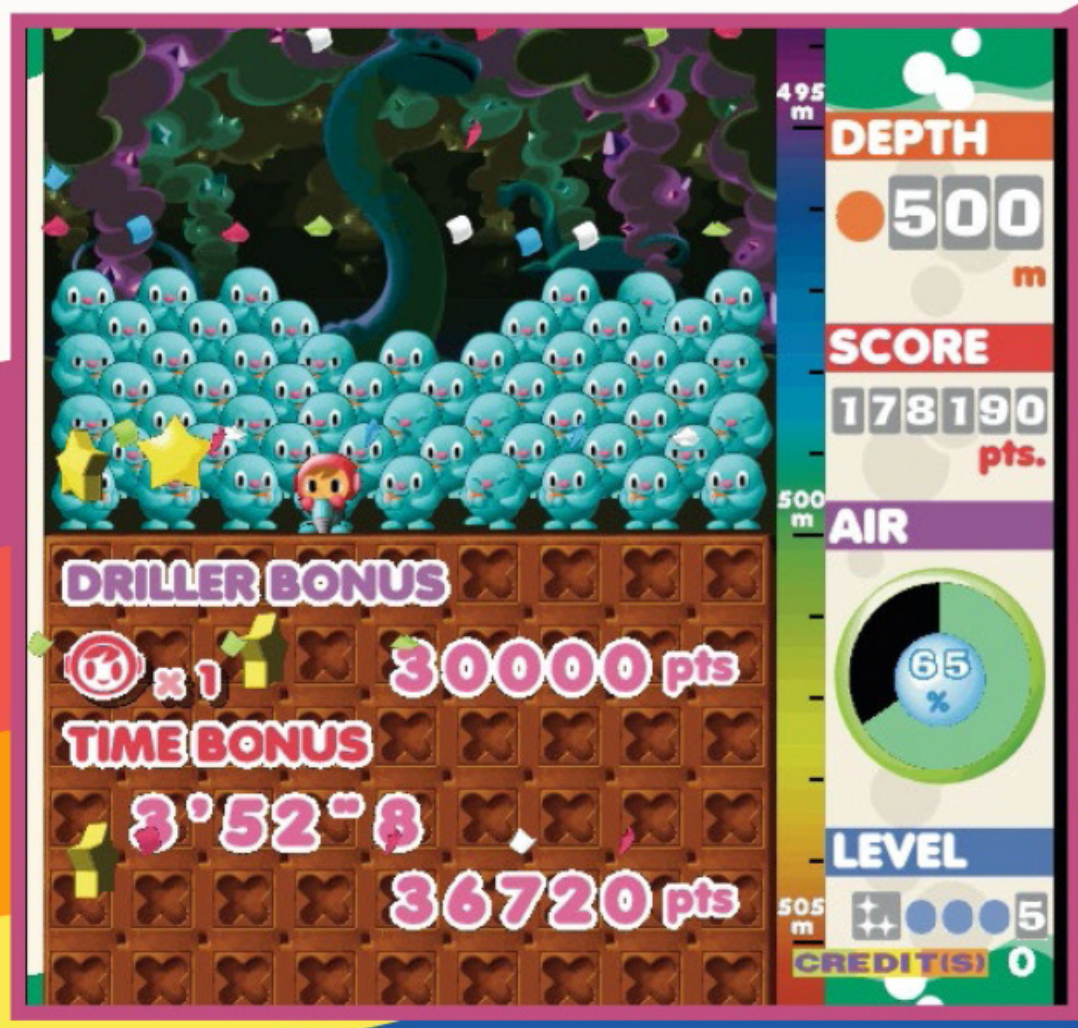
"It's not a rare occasion to unofficially start making a game with an instinctively thought-up idea and using a programmer that isn't busy," he admits. "I was actually the manager at that time and, when I was walking through Namco's offices, one of the creators suddenly told me to try playing it. When I first saw it, I thought it was something similar to *Tetris*, but I soon became addicted to it – and the next minute I realised that I had already been playing for three hours. I became very excited and told the creator how brilliant the idea was, and decided to produce it."

If Yoshizawa first thought that *Mr Driller* was derivative of *Tetris* then he wasn't the only one. There are key similarities between the two games, not least the fact that both involve various angular shapes falling from the top of the screen and linking together before disappearing. The big difference, of course, is that in *Mr Driller* you didn't control the blocks themselves, but the little character caught in between them, with his drill used to break a path through the blocks to the safety below. And as Yoshizawa explains, the development team's inspiration was actually so far away from *Tetris* that they weren't even inspired by videogames at all. "The first triggers of the idea came from traditional games Japanese children play," he outlines. "One is called 'Bo-taoshi', where you make a pile in a sandbox and thrust a stick into the top of it. You then take turns to prune away the sand from the pile and the one who makes the stick fall is the loser. Another is called 'Shogi-kuzushi', where you make a pile of Japanese chess pieces and take turns taking the pieces one by one. Just like Bo-taoshi, the one that makes the pile fall loses. While watching these games, we thought it would be thrilling to actually be inside these games, with the sand or chess pieces falling in at you."

The team predicted, quite rightly, that trying to survive the experience of being caught inside all of these falling blocks would be a rather thrilling one for the player. "We were thinking about these kinds of traditional games and imagining ourselves in a situation like an avalanche, where the way in which the pieces collapse can be estimated, but then when it actually does collapse, something unexpected occurs. Creating this snowball effect fit very well with the puzzle game elements, and I feel that if we were thinking of making a puzzle game from the beginning, then we wouldn't have brought up the idea of directly controlling a character."

"THE NEXT MINUTE I REALISED THAT I HAD ALREADY BEEN PLAYING FOR THREE HOURS"
HIDEO YOSHIZAWA

Deceptively simple, *Mr Driller*'s gameplay is about more than just drilling your way to the bottom. You have to take regular detours, for example, to fill up the main character's ever-dwindling oxygen supply, while it's often necessary to keep track of which colour blocks are around you. If four of a kind join together, then they'll disappear and potentially cause chain reactions as those blocks above them drop down. This opens up pathways to the bottom, of course, but it also creates a huge risk, allowing other stray blocks to fall onto our hero and



» [Arcade] After all these years we still don't really understand the story of *Mr Driller*. What are all these things doing at the bottom of the well?

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DIG DUG
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982

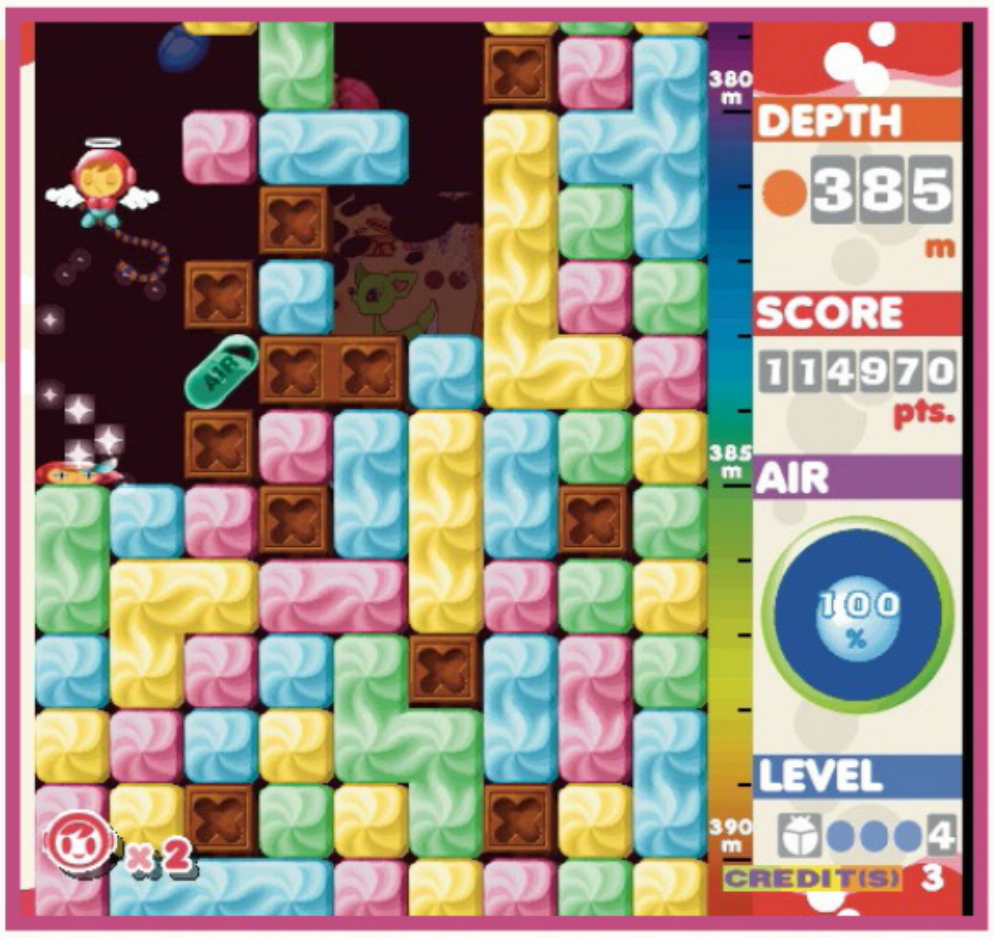
TEKKEN
SYSTEM: ARCADE, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1994

KATAMARI DAMACY: REROLL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SWITCH, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2018

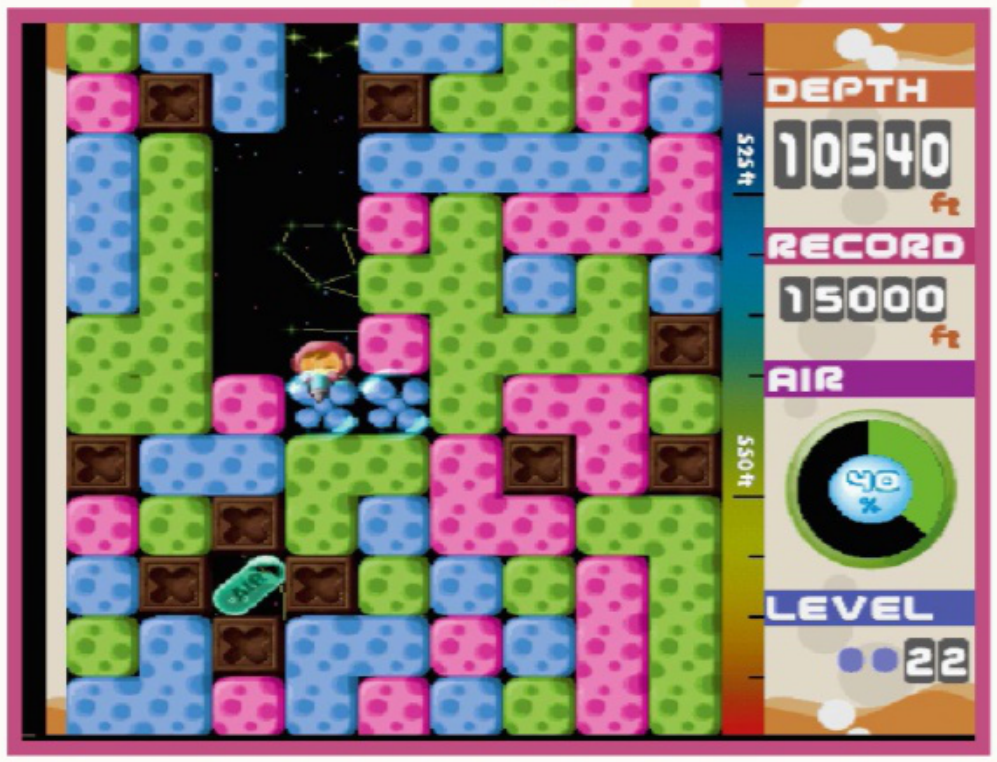
BEYOND MR DRILLER

WILL SUSUMU HORI EVER APPEAR IN A NON-PUZZLE GAME?

Given the cutesy appeal of Susumu Hori's character design, we can't help but ask Yoshizawa why Namco never expanded the *Mr Driller* universe into other types of games, particularly mascot platform games, in the same way developers have done with *Pac-Man* games in the past. "I would like to make one if I was given the opportunity," he surprisingly reveals. "I actually have some ideas, such as making various vehicles move using the drill or flying though the skies by putting an airscrew on his drill." Sounds good to us, hopefully Yoshizawa will have the opportunity to make his vision someday.



» [Arcade] Suffocating causes you to leave your body and float heavenward. Poor Susumu.



» [PlayStation] Survival mode lets you dig to even greater depths than the arcade version.

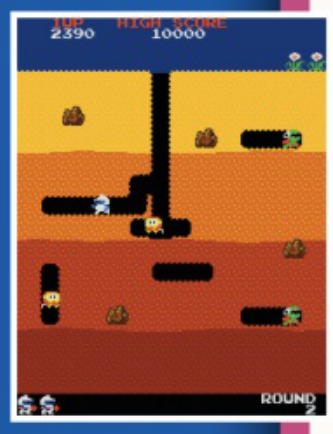
crush him to death. Keep an eye on those coloured blocks, however, and you can cleverly predict which ones will stick together without disappearing and causing chaos, leaving you with a nice safe passage to climb down.

Remembering all of these elements and more is essential for score-attack players intent on reaching the bottom of either a 500m or 1,000m game with every extra life intact and every single air capsule collected. And it's because of all these elements – the oxygen, the falling blocks, the unbreakable blocks – that *Mr Driller* becomes such an addictive game. It's a balance that took an awful lot of iteration to achieve, according to Yoshizawa. "At first the game was endless," he reveals, "but I felt it should have a greater sense of accomplishment, so we made improvements that would perfect the game." The team added a separation every 100 metres, in order to give the player a sense of progress as well as to vary the arrangement of the game's elements. And after realising the unbreakable blocks could halt the game (should the main character become surrounded by them), the team allowed these blocks to be broken by five drill strikes at the cost of a small amount of oxygen. Yoshizawa mentions that each level of the well only ever uses either two or four different coloured blocks at once, and that experiments with other numbers wreaked havoc with the gameplay. "If we made them five colours," he says, "then chains didn't occur often enough and it became difficult to make the blocks collapse. So we kept the number at four colours. Just as a test, we also made one mission that used only one colour, but they all disappeared with a single dig so we didn't use that either."

Iteration on the *Mr Driller* concept continued much longer than anticipated, as location tests threw up problems with the game that Namco could not have predicted. "When we first tried the game out at the game centre, the goal of usual puzzle games, like *Tetris*, was to erase the blocks. So many players were trying to erase all of the blocks and not dig to the bottom. From there we had to make several revisions, such as adding panels that mention that players should dig to the bottom, making the remaining air glow light to warn players that they would suffocate without collecting enough air capsules. After all these revisions, players finally realised that the game's goal was to dig to the bottom."

MR DRILLER: AN EVOLUTION

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF NAMCO'S POPULAR SERIES



DIG DUG

Mr Driller's basic ideas evolved from the primitive-but-much-loved digging gameplay of Namco's 1982 coin-op hit *Dig Dug*. Its hero, Taizo Hori, is Susumu Hori's father.

MR DRILLER DRILL LAND

This 2002 release greatly expanded the original game's mechanics, adding stages built around boss battles and RPG mechanics. (We're showing off the HD update of Star Driller here.)

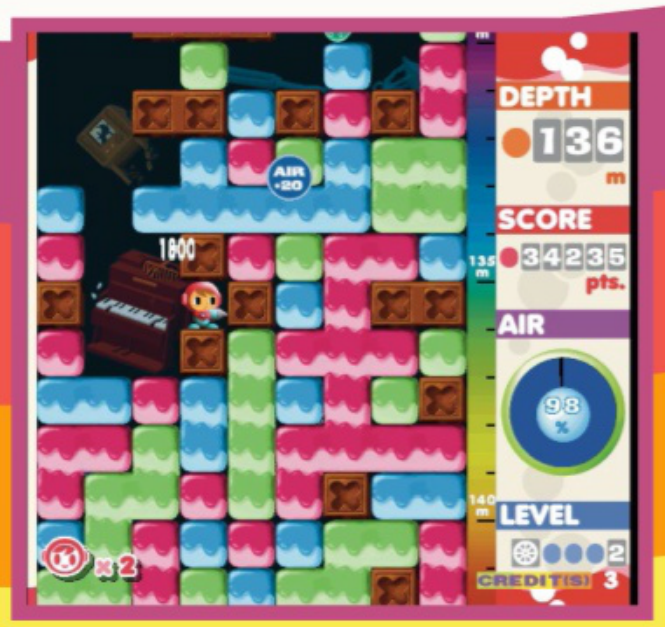
MR DRILLER ONLINE

As you'd expect from the name, this 2008 Xbox 360 exclusive is online-based. While the online side is rather quiet nowadays, the single-player mode remains good fun.

STAR TRIGON

Team Driller has rarely deviated from the *Mr Driller* template, but it did find time to make a cool arcade/iPhone spin-off in the form of *Star Trigon*. Sadly, it has now been delisted.

» [Arcade] You can't move while falling, but it gives you time to plan your next route.



» [Arcade] We don't recommend drilling these blocks when you're low on air…

"AT FIRST IT WAS ENDLESS, BUT I FELT IT SHOULD HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT"
HIDEO YOSHIZAWA

If the game of *Mr Driller* constantly evolved during the development process, then it might not be surprising to hear that the character of Mr Driller did too. In fact, even all these years later, you might not realise that the main character isn't called Mr Driller at all, but is actually named Susumu Hori, in reference to Taizo Hori, the main character of Namco's other classic digging game, 1982's *Dig Dug*.

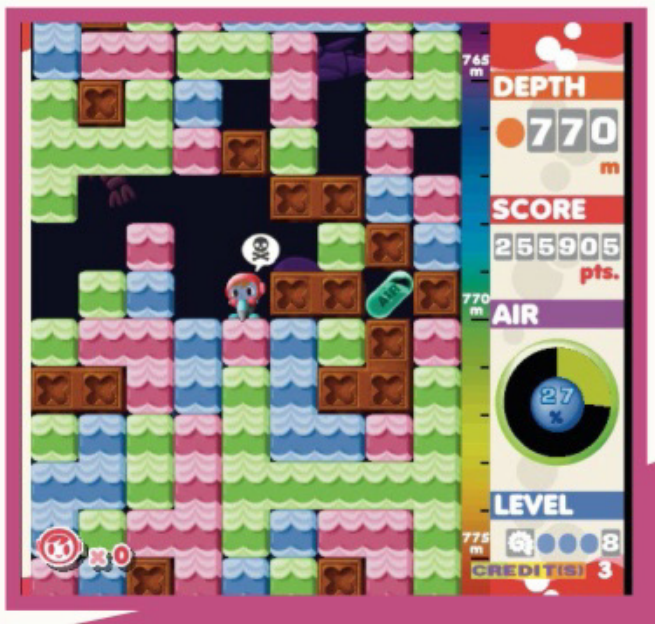
"There were various character designs along the way," says Yoshizawa. "There were designs such as a tall character, a baby and even an animal. But at one point, the character became Susumu's design; when I saw only his face shown on the title screen I felt this was it. What was nice was that, if we were to put it in the arcade game at the time, looking at the character I felt a certain strange feeling because the picture was different and would stand out. I felt that it was actually more fun."

Before the character of Susumu was fully designed, Namco was in fact using the Taizo Hori sprite from *Dig Dug* as a placeholder in the prototype. "Along the way, Susumu's design was made, and he was supposed to be a young boy so he naturally became the son of the main character in *Dig Dug*," reveals Yoshizawa. It's a reference that goes over the heads of most players, but is one that Namco has nevertheless built upon over the years. Taizo Hori has appeared as a playable character in the series since 2001's *Mr Driller G*, while Susumu returned the favour by making a cameo in the 2005 DS game *Dig Dug: Digging Strike*.

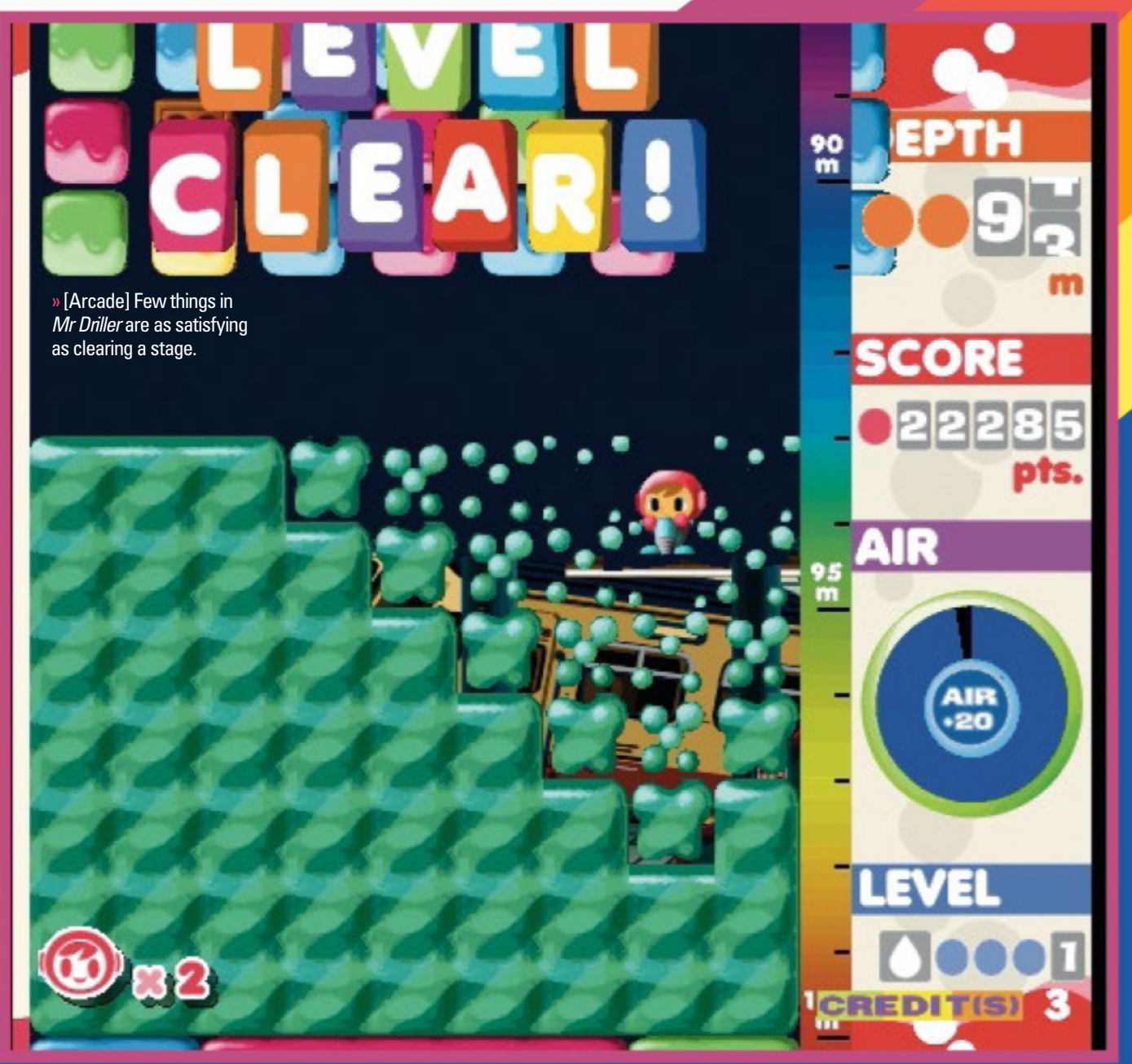
Despite debuting just as the arcade scene was beginning to die off, *Mr Driller*'s mix of puzzle and action mechanics made it a firm favourite with a certain type of gamer, and home console ports quickly followed for PlayStation and Dreamcast, in addition to PC, Game Boy Color and WonderSwan conversions. These initial ports concentrated on retaining the score-attack challenge that made the arcade original so compelling, but some of them also added a Time Attack mode that Yoshizawa personally oversaw. "To add that feature, we needed to make a fun stage structure with a certain fixed shape," he explains. "We were able to make ten variety-rich stages… it's really fun to play."

Many sequels naturally followed over the years, the best of which is surely *Mr Driller Drill Land*, which was originally released as a Japanese exclusive GameCube game in 2002, but was thankfully given a wider release, as well as a HD remaster in 2020. *Mr Driller Drill Land* is a theme-park-structured game that enables you to play several different variations on the classic game, including one that even incorporates RPG elements and boss battles. It's a truly inspired example of sequel design, but one that Yoshizawa remains quite humble about. "When we develop a sequel, it is how we will introduce a new gaming experience to the basic system that is the main consideration. We can only add new features that can be enjoyed by everyone no matter their skill level."

Yoshizawa puts *Mr Driller*'s enduring success down to the original idea's evergreen gameplay, which provides a slightly different experience every time and never grows boring. "Have you ever experienced being crushed just 20 metres before the goal because you instinctively went to collect air that you actually didn't need?" he asks. "People that have experienced this will never be able to quit. This game has that kind of magic to it."



» [Arcade] For some reason these blocks always remind us of delicious-looking cream treats.

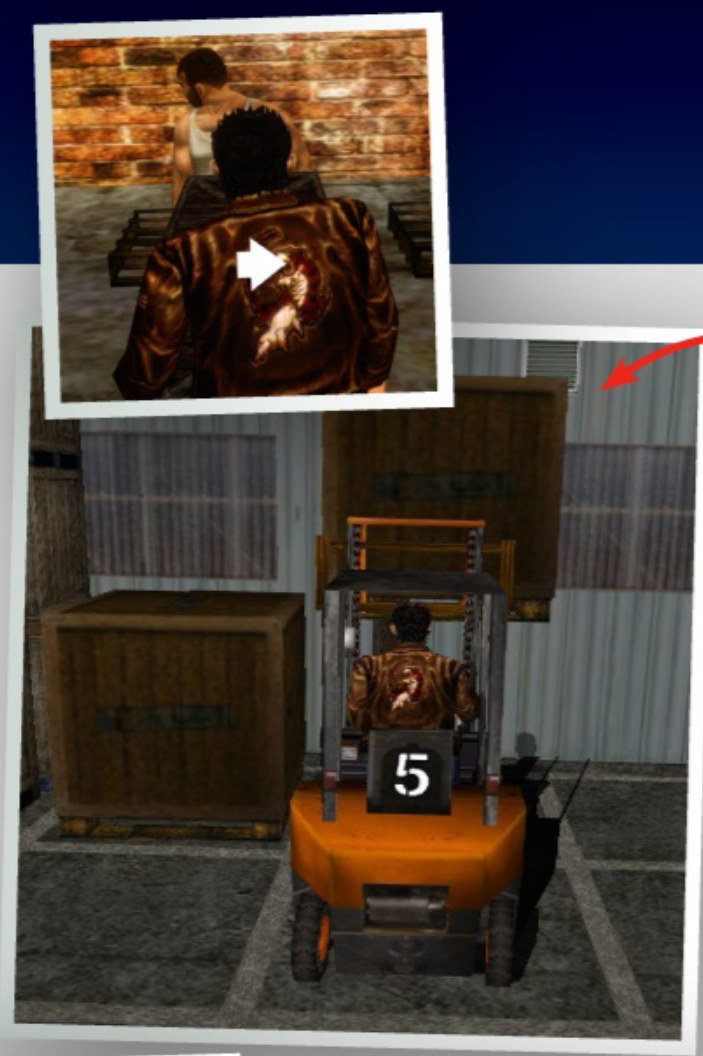


» [Arcade] Few things in *Mr Driller* are as satisfying as clearing a stage.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

CRATES

Whether they hold the power-up you've been desperately hoping for or function as a handy moveable platform, crates have been a ubiquitous item of videogame furniture for decades. Unfortunately they're frequently taken for granted as a result, so to correct that injustice we'll celebrate eight great crates



SHENMUE

If you want to see the most lavishly rendered crates of the Nineties, this Dreamcast epic is where you'll find them – and you'll be seeing a lot of them, as a substantial part of the game is spent ferrying them around the harbour as a forklift driver. Rumour has it that although the cargo containers are never opened, individual contents were modelled for every single one. That's false, mostly because we made it up, but Yu Suzuki's love of crates is so true that he put a new crate-shifting bit in *Shenmue II* and brought the forklift back for *Shenmue III*.

MERCS

The artist tasked with drawing crates for the sequel to *Commando* really went out of their way to make them lovely. Not only are they drawn at a jaunty angle, they feature no fewer than four frames of animation that show progressive levels of damage. They even remembered the debris.

CRASH BANDICOOT

If you want variety, look no further than the *Crash Bandicoot* games – there are normal crates, strong crates, bouncy crates, crates containing extra lives, even explosive crates. And you've got to smash them all, which is frankly disrespectful. We reckon someone on the Naughty Dog team hated their previous job in shipping.

DOUBLE DRAGON II: THE REVENGE

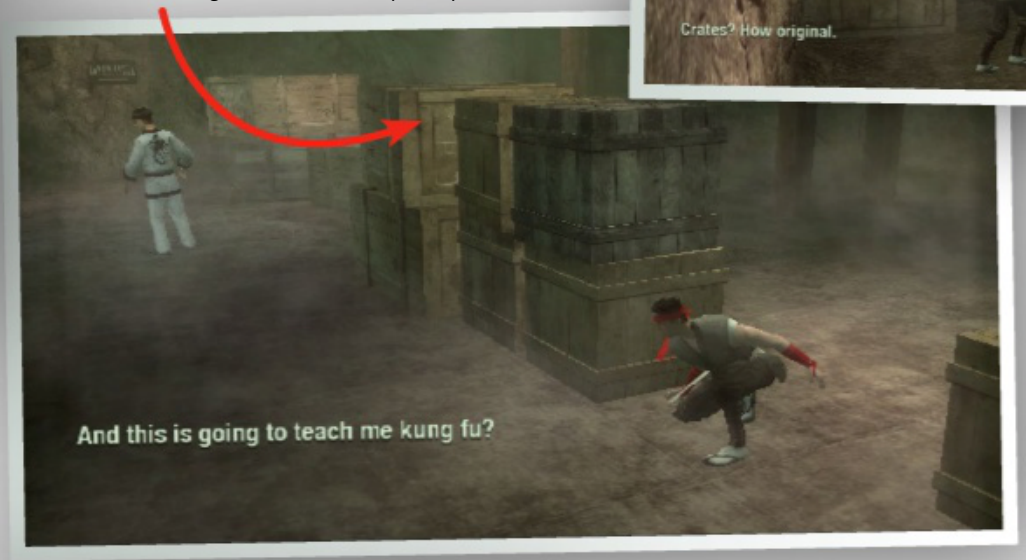
The second game in the beat-'em-up series means business, and shows it from the start. As well as featuring some decorative crates in the background, it boasts one of gaming's most durable crates. Chuck it at bad guys all day long with no worries – it'll never break. That's quality craftsmanship.

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

■ They say that good things come in small packages, and you'd be forgiven for thinking these crates are tiny. But give them a second look and you'll see that they're actually about knee-high against Joe Musashi, which actually makes them decently large – certainly large enough for ten shurikens, in any case.

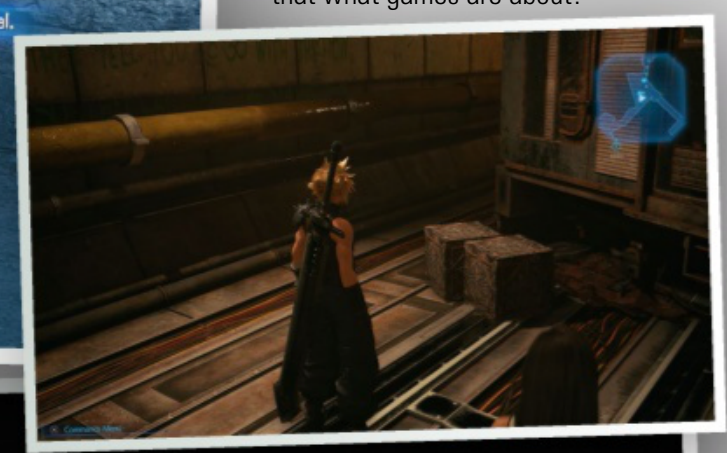
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

■ A combat training exercise in this film licence features perhaps the first post-modern use of crates in videogames, as they're used to highlight the virtual nature of the world. Neo is encouraged to "think of it as a videogame tutorial" and eventually quips, "Crates, how original," when they are pointed out.



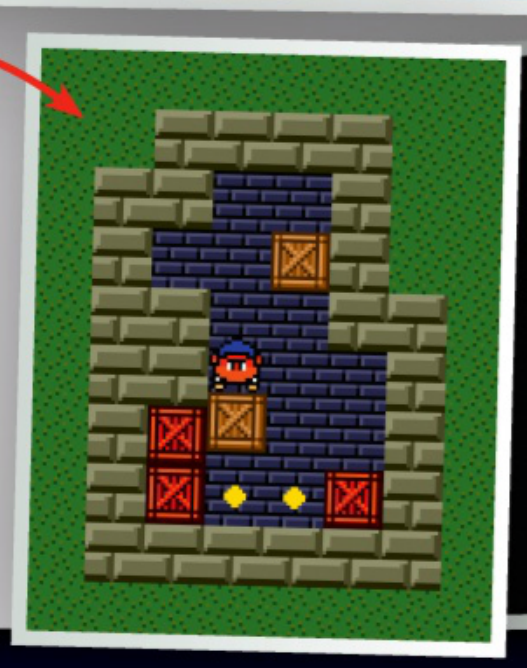
FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

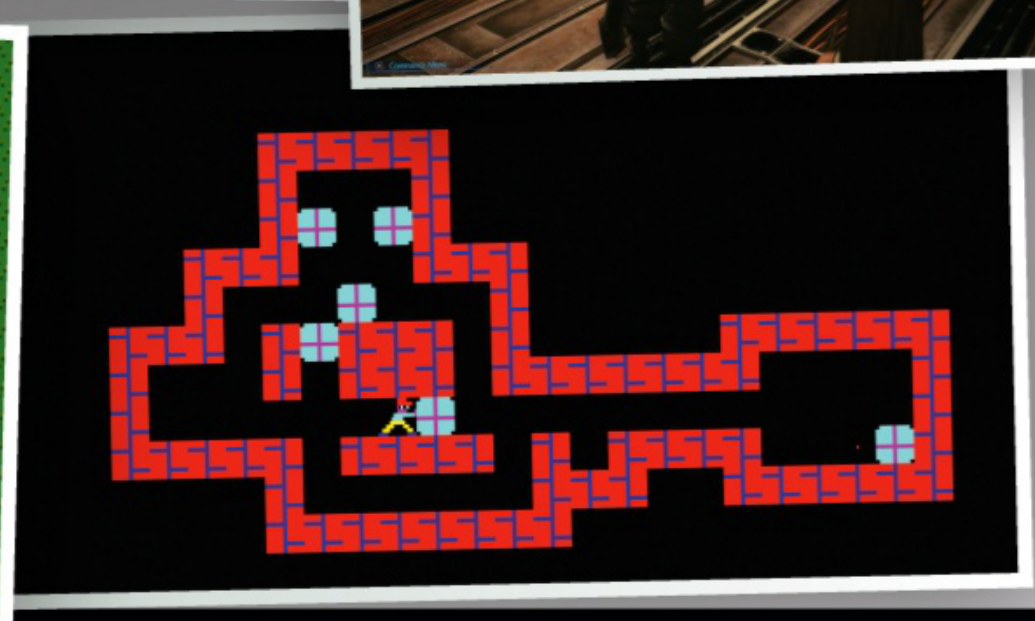
■ Here's a hot take – this remake betters the source material. The PlayStation original might have had groundbreaking cinematic sequences, emotional story events and an awesome soundtrack, but it didn't have loads of crates that shatter satisfyingly when you hit them with Cloud's big sword. Isn't that what games are about?



SOKOBAN

■ We've highlighted the NEC PC-8801 original and *Sokoban World* for the PC Engine here, but honestly we could choose any one of the many, many versions out there for this entry. Some of them have nicer crates than others, but that's really not the point. What elevates *Sokoban*'s crates above their numerous imitators is that they are the true stars of the show. Sure, there's a guy pushing them around, but if there are no crates, there is no *Sokoban*. How many other games give that much prominence to crates?





THE EVOLUTION OF CRIMSON SKIES

ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED FOR VIRTUAL WORLD CENTERS AND THEN ADAPTED INTO A BOARD GAME, CRIMSON SKIES REALISED ITS FULL POTENTIAL WITH A PC TITLE AND ITS XBOX SEQUEL. DESIGNERS JORDAN WEISMAN AND BILL MORRISON CHART THE COURSE OF THE POPULAR SERIES

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Some ideas are just too good to give up on. Take *Corsairs*, a multiplayer pulp adventure title designed in the Nineties for networked gaming pods in entertainment centres around the world. Co-creator Jordan Weisman's thought was to add to the attraction of his centres by complementing their existing titles *BattleTech* and *Red Planet* with a third offering, and he remembers tying it into an evolving narrative. "As we added more story and more different worlds to the Virtual World Centers we needed an underlying fiction," Jordan considers. "So we created the Virtual Geographic League, and this Thirties-explorer aesthetic. We were thinking about a third title, so Mitch Gitelman and I started a Thirties aviation combat game called *Corsairs*, since so many of the League's characters were famous aviators – like Amelia Earhart and Howard Hughes."

But as thrilling as the idea of multiplayer dogfights in bespoke gaming cockpits seemed, the declining income of Jordan's centres caused him to put *Corsairs* on the back burner – until he needed a concept for a board game, which he subsequently called *Crimson Skies*. "I realised it had been over a decade since I had created a new world, and I decided that maybe that was what I needed to do," Jordan recollects. "So I went back to the core of *Corsairs*, and I built a world around it. But since I wasn't able to do *Corsairs* at the Virtual World Centers I did it as a board game at night with a couple of guys from work – Dave McCoy and Vic Bonilla most prominently."

Of course, a room full of immersive gaming cabs was quite different from a tabletop title, but the *Crimson Skies* board game retained the combat at the heart of *Corsairs*. "The board game still had a lot of dogfighting in it, but it became much more story-based," Jordan explains. "In essence, it was treated as if it was a role-playing game – in terms of the depth of its world, character development and storytelling. You didn't need a game master, there were board-game mechanics, but they had RPG sensibilities. We went into full character descriptions and stories, and the scenarios became very story-centric rather than just three versus four aircraft, and go!"

A year later, Jordan's PC games company – Fasa Interactive – was bought by Microsoft, which made him its creative director. A *Crimson Skies* title for PC was greenlit soon after, which channelled classic radio adventures and *Star Wars*. "Radio drama was a very big inspiration," Jordan acknowledges. "We were trying to figure out how to get what seemed like an epic story out of a very small budget. Well radio could create any scene in your head, and we could do that just with words. So I

» Bill Morrison is now a senior lecturer at the DigiPen Institute Of Technology in Washington.

» [PC] The colourful opponents in *Crimson Skies* help to bring the game's story to life.

» *Crimson Skies* started off as a multiplayer virtual entertainment title called *Corsairs* in Jordan's Virtual World Centers.

» [PC] The gameplay in the PC version of *Crimson Skies* was inspired by the original *X-Wing* game.

» Jordan Weisman is currently working on a CRPG set in a *Crimson Skies*-adjacent world.

» [PC] Barnstorming is a big part of *Crimson Skies*, with some missions being entirely stunt-based.

» [PC] One of the joys of *Crimson Skies* is its eclectic range of combat aircraft.

"MOST DOGFIGHT GAMES SUCKED, BECAUSE THEY BECAME TWO PLANES CHASING EACH OTHER AROUND IN A CIRCLE. I DIDN'T WANT CRIMSON SKIES TO EVOLVE INTO THAT"

JORDAN WEISMAN

thought what if we based the storytelling around radio drama? From a gameplay standpoint, the original *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games were definitely models. They had the right balance of arcade fun and simulation, and they used really good storytelling techniques."

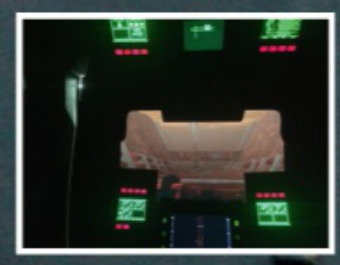
The *Crimson Skies* PC game was set between World Wars rather than in outer space, but Jordan was determined that his fictional period piece wouldn't fall into the same trap as some earlier WWI and WWII flight combat titles. "Most dogfight games sucked, because they basically became two planes chasing each other around in a circle," Jordan points out. "I didn't want *Crimson Skies* to evolve into that, so one of our pillars was that it wouldn't take place way above the terrain. You never had a mission where you were just flying around without something big that you were having to navigate through or past. So the zeppelins became our 'aerial terrain,' and to accomplish some missions you had to get really close to them, which created something like flying over the ground."

More sleight of hand followed to give players of the *Crimson Skies* PC title the sensation of flying at top speeds, while also being able to control their aircraft. "We cheated with the speed," Jordan admits, "because actually the faster you ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: FORMAT SHIFTING

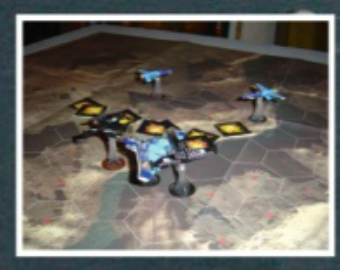
THE MULTI-PLATFORM TITLES IN THE CRIMSON SKIES SERIES

CORSAIRS



Intended to be the third game at Virtual World Entertainment's Virtual Combat Centers, *Corsairs* was a Thirties-set multiplayer dogfight that was shelved before going into production. It was picked up by VWE's sister company Fasa Interactive as a PC title, but that was cancelled too.

CRIMSON SKIES (BOARD GAME)



Designed out of hours by Virtual World Entertainment founder Jordan Weisman and some of his colleagues, *Crimson Skies* took the aesthetics and dogfighting from *Corsairs* and ran with them. Although based around board-game mechanics, it incorporated RPG elements and character profiles.

CRIMSON SKIES (PC)

Jordan Weisman's pet project while he was Microsoft Games creative director, *Crimson Skies* on PC dispensed with its tabletop namesake's RPG aspects, but retained its aerial combat. It also kept its rich back story, while adding a narrative driven by off-camera spoken dialogue.

CRIMSON SKIES (ARCADE)

Essentially an enhanced port of the PC game, the *Crimson Skies* coin-op appeared on an updateable multi-game system developed by Tsunami Visual Technologies. As well as a standard upright cab, there were motion-based variants, two with acrylic bubble seats to channel the game's sound.

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

Visually superior to the *Crimson Skies* PC title in terms of environments and aircraft, *High Road* jettisoned the original's linear missions in favour of multiple selectable challenges. But rather than simply choosing from them pre-game, you explored its open-world stages to find them.

» The *Crimson Skies* board game allowed Jordan Weisman to flesh out the world he'd devised for *Corsairs*.

» [PC] The missions in *High Road To Revenge* were influenced by those in *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

AMAZING AIRCRAFT

THE CRIMSON SKIES MANUFACTURERS' TOP FLYING MACHINES

KESTREL

Fast, armed to the teeth with bombs and rockets, and boasting an impressive flight range, the Kestrel is the perfect plane to take down a zeppelin. Its unique twin hull gives it tremendous stability in level flight, but the design restricts the Kestrel's manoeuvrability in dogfights.

BLOODHAWK

One of the fastest aircraft in the *Crimson Skies* world – especially when fitted with a nitro injection engine. The Bloodhawk is also highly manoeuvrable and has a precise sighting system. Its one drawback is its high stall speed, which means that its engines cut out if you slow down.

BRIGAND

The Brigand is a beast, it's both heavily armed and weighs a ton! This latter aspect leaves it with poor acceleration, although its top speed is nothing to sniff at. It's also fairly agile given its mass, although its heavy engine coupled with its short hull gives it quirky handling.

DAUPHIN

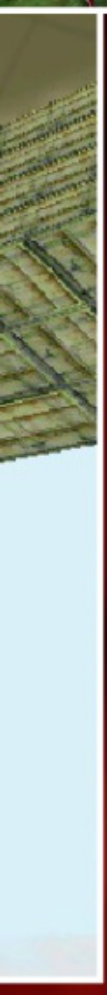
A diminutive seaplane favoured by Cajun coastal pirates, the Dauphin is nimble enough to avoid zeppelin weapons while spraying them with bullets. Too lightweight to take into dogfights against more durable fighter planes, but ideally suited for lightning strikes over the ocean waves.

PIRANHA

Fitted with a Tesla projector capable of disabling the electronics in an opponent's aircraft, the Piranha can leave its enemies defenceless before attacking them with its machine guns. The first act is easier said than done, however, and in a fair fight its weapons are underwhelming.

» [PC] Updrafts help you to not crash into oceans and the ground in the PC game.

» [PC] Although rarely on-screen, you seldom go anywhere in the PC version of *Crimson Skies* without a wingman.



flew the less manoeuvrable you became, and the less interesting the dogfights were. So the planes in *Crimson Skies* moved *really* slowly. But we needed to make you *feel* like you were moving fast, so we had all of these particle systems shooting things at you constantly. That meant you got the sense that you were flying fast, but in reality you were flying slowly enough that you could manoeuvre through all of the crazy terrain."

The mission structure in the PC version of *Crimson Skies* was far more sensible, in so much as it took players on a linear path from one to the next, albeit with an option to move on from missions that they felt they just couldn't overcome. "We wanted to make sure that every dollar ended up on-screen, so we decided to make it completely linear," Jordan reasons. "But one of the things that drove me absolutely crazy in linear games was that when you hit something that you just couldn't do then you got stuck. So in *Crimson Skies* you could skip missions, because we didn't want to get people frustrated with that."

Technically, the PC version of *Crimson Skies* could have got by with just one type of plane for its heroes and another for their foes, but Jordan instead wanted an entire range of aircraft, which players could try out once they obtained them in-game. "I did a bunch of research on experimental aircraft from between the World Wars," Jordan recalls, "A lot of the airplanes in *Crimson Skies* started as stuff that was in actual development, and then we exaggerated from there. Lex Story and Dave McCoy took my research, and then created these gorgeous planes. The diversity was because we wanted to provide diversity to the missions. Like the little autogyro allowed for really stealthy gameplay, rather than one of the big bruisers where you just went in and faced the opposition down."

> "A LOT OF THE AIRPLANES IN CRIMSON SKIES STARTED AS STUFF THAT WAS IN ACTUAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THEN WE EXAGGERATED FROM THERE"
>
> JORDAN WEISMAN

Additional diversity was added to Crimson Skies' PC missions in the form of a group of wingmen; non-player characters – male and female cohorts of the game's protagonist – who would fly alongside him in supportive roles. "A fundamental of the pilot fantasy is the wingman," Jordan points out. "Both from a functionality standpoint – for survivability – but also narratively. So we wanted to include wingmen in the game from the beginning. It was also a way for us to get in a lot more natural storytelling. In terms of why they weren't built into a co-op mode, I don't remember. Because *Crimson Skies* did have multiplayer, and the Brigand did have a gunner position. But it's entirely possible that it was cut due to budget constraints."

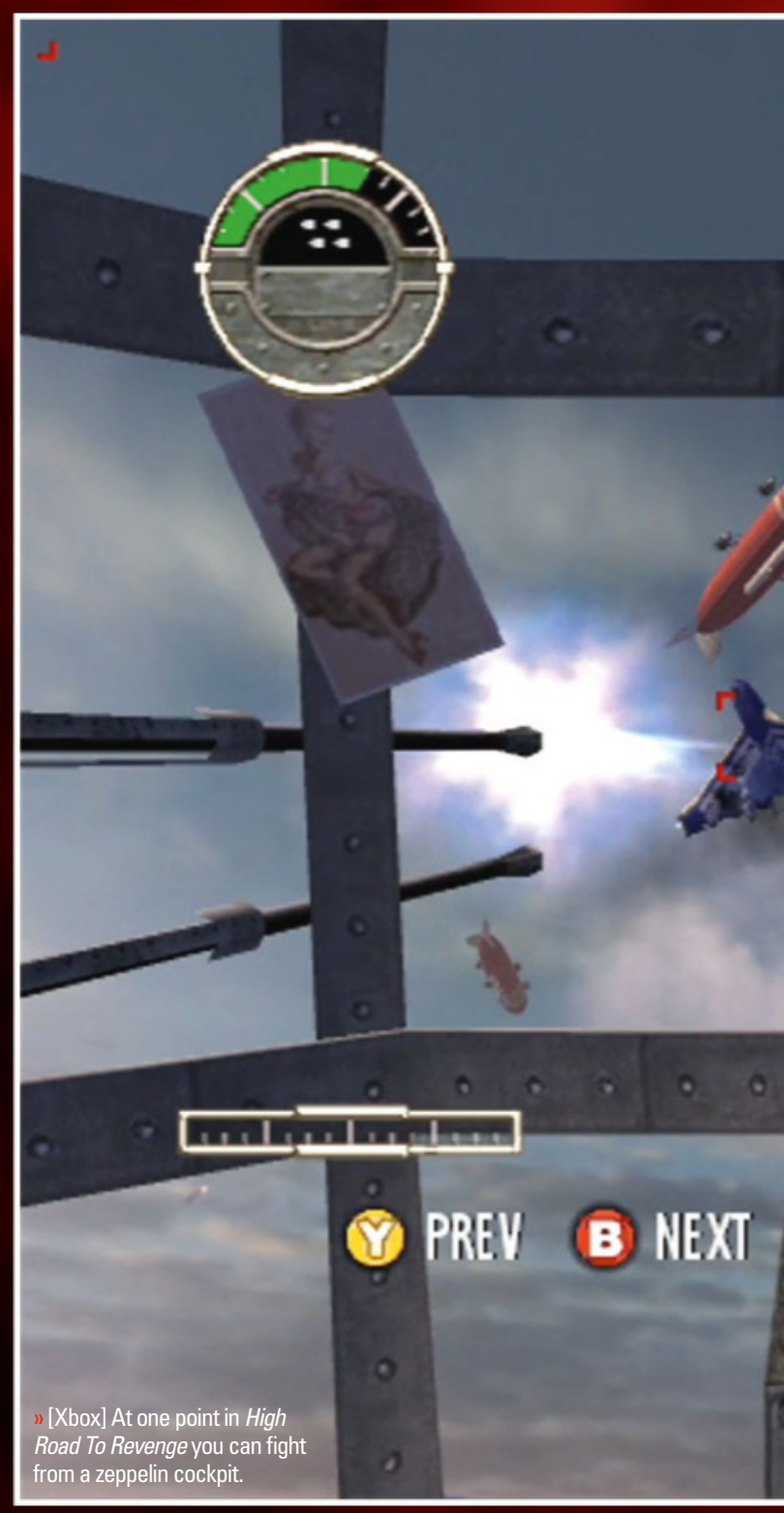
Despite this omission, some other interesting co-op modes did make it into Jordan's PC version, including one that put players in charge of a long-forgotten mode of transport. "We knew we had to have Dogfight, because that one was obvious," Jordan says of *Crimson Skies*' multiplayer options. "But the most interesting one for me was Zeppelin Vs Zeppelin, because that was at the core of the game fiction – these behemoths of the air. So for me that was what we put a lot of the emphasis on. Then Capture The Flag was actually an outgrowth of the Virtual World Center experience *Martian Football*, because we borrowed a lot from the fun we saw people having with that."

Two years after *Crimson Skies* was released on PC in the year 2000, Jordan Weisman left Microsoft for other opportunities, around which time Tsunami Visual Technologies adapted the game for the arcades as one of a choice of titles available on a multi-title system.

A year before the release of these coin-ops, work had begun on an Xbox sequel to the PC game called *Crimson Skies: High Road To Revenge*. Then a year into this follow-up's development, designer Bill

» [Xbox] There's unlimited ammo in *High Road To Revenge*, but your guns overheat if you use them constantly.

» [Xbox] Some missions in *High Road To Revenge* involve racing for cash instead of fighting for it.



» [Xbox] At one point in *High Road To Revenge* you can fight from a zeppelin cockpit.

Morrison found out about the project while visiting LA. "I had been working at Totally Games on the *X-Wing* series for PC, that's where I got my start in development," Bill remembers. "But the studio was going through a downturn, so I left. I subsequently went down to E3 in Los Angeles. I brought my resume, and I let people know I was looking for work. Then I ran into a producer who I'd worked with, and he was now at Microsoft. He wasn't working on *High Road To Revenge*, but he told me that the project needed a new designer."

The skills Bill had accrued while working on the likes of *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* proved to be exactly what Microsoft wanted for *High Road*, and so his interview led to him taking on the role of designer on a major redesign. "I was already familiar with the PC game, and it was flight action, which was absolutely within my wheelhouse," Bill beams. "I knew what Microsoft was looking to do when I interviewed, because it was showing *High Road* at that E3 behind closed doors. For whatever reason, the project wasn't testing very well. It wasn't fun, and I think it had already had a year of development." Although he was hired to re-work the project, Bill recognised the importance of only making changes to *High Road* that respected the storylines established by the earlier games in the series. "We really wanted the player to feel like they were in this pulpy world, and our narrative director and project lead were *way* more familiar with the *Crimson Skies* licence than me," Bill admits. "There were times when I asked if we could do something, and they would explain that in the *Crimson Skies* world it didn't work that way, so we couldn't do it."

> "THE GAME WASN'T BUILT WITH A OPEN WORLD FROM THE BEGINNING, BUT WE FOUND A WAY SO YOU COULD FLY THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENT AND FIND MISSIONS"
> JORDAN WEISMAN

Outside *High Road*'s narrative, however, Bill was able to try anything out that he thought might work, including giving the sequel an open world where players had to explore to find missions that they could then choose to accept or decline. It proved to be an inspired decision that greatly enhanced the evolving Xbox sequel. "*GTA III* had just come out, and I remember the team really wanted to do something more open like that," Bill grins, thinking about the change. "We didn't have the infrastructure set up at the time, and the game wasn't built with a big open world in mind from the beginning, but we found a way so that you could just fly through the environment and find where the missions were."

While freeing up one aspect of *High Road*, Bill worked hard to lock down another. More specifically, he configured its aircraft's machine guns to overheat if overused and metered its planes' special moves, where time outs kicked in after performing a certain number of stunts. "We wanted to put in some sort of limitation, because it made the combat more tactical," Bill notes. "Otherwise you could fire all the time, and there would be no cost! It was the same thing with the special moves, and these limitations just added so much more to the game. You now had to think about when you could do a special move and when you were going to overheat your guns."

Additional depth of gameplay was incorporated with a decision to give players of *High Road* the option to temporarily leave their planes, and to take control of powerful ground-based flack guns and the heavy artillery found in the game's airborne zeppelins. "The turret gameplay wasn't a core mechanic, but it was still consistent with the gameplay that we had," Bill qualifies. "Sometimes you were shooting from a moving zeppelin, and that just

» [Xbox] *High Road To Revenge* is undeniably a flight combat title, but it squeezes in some ground-based shoot-'em-up sections.

provided variation. Some people couldn't wait to get onto the big guns, because they were really good at defending the zeppelin from inside it, and then other people were ace pilots, so they could defend it from outside in their planes."

Almost an entirely different game when it came out in comparison to how it played when Bill first joined the project, *High Road* was praised for its open world and accessibility – although these positive reviews didn't turn the game into a best-seller. In reviewing its PC predecessor, co-creator Jordan Weisman looks back with pride, and makes clear that he's keen to revisit *Crimson Skies* if given half a chance. "I remain very, very proud of that game, and the quality of the storytelling we were able to pull off," Jordan says with a smile. "I would *love* to make more *Crimson Skies* stuff. I've tried to talk to Microsoft about it, because it let me come back in and play with *BattleTech* and *Shadowrun*. So maybe one day it'll let me do that with *Crimson Skies*, or somebody else will take a stab at it, and hopefully make something great." ✱

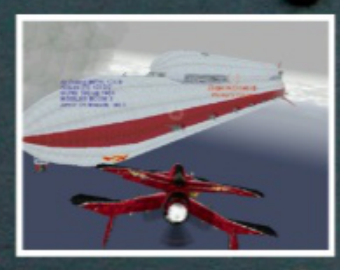
Gaming pod photos courtesy of Nickolas Smith, board game photos courtesy of Michael Schau, coin-op screenshot photo courtesy of Paladin.

» [Xbox] You can choose to fly any plane that you've appropriated in *High Road To Revenge*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: MEMORABLE MISSIONS

STANDOUT ASSIGNMENTS OF THE CRIMSON SKIES VIDEOGAMES

THE RED MENACE

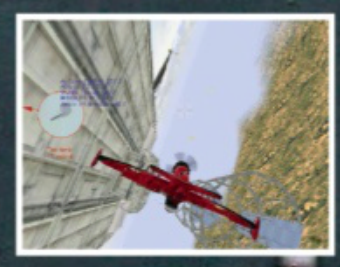


A rescue mission, where a friend is being held captive on a zeppelin. You can't go in all guns blazing, instead you target half of its engines to slow it enough to be boarded by an ally. The zeppelin's air defences slow your progress, however, and its treasure attracts rival pirates!

THE GREAT PLANE ROBBERY

In a test of nerves, you have to steal the world's largest plane – the Spruce Goose. Its hangar is guarded by autogyros, with a door open at one end that you fly into and blow off the door opposite. Then as the Goose takes off you have to defend it from patrol boats and a combat ace.

THE FIGHT FOR THE FIGAROA



A satisfying mix of targeting then defending a zeppelin. Naturally it has aircraft supporting it, which attack in waves, but the key is to shoot its cargo free and blast its turrets. This lets your wingman board, then you just have to stop the enemy planes from disabling its engines.

CAJUN COOKIN'

As missions go, Cajun Cookin' is short but sweet. It's a case of revenge, where you pick off oil tanks belonging to a Cajun crew. As you might imagine, this doesn't go down well, and they soon retaliate. They fly in pairs, with one drawing you out while the other attacks from behind.

OPEN SESAME

Gatecrashing a heavily guarded cave doesn't sound like fun, especially when the only way in is through a reinforced steel door. The trick is to take out the cave's air security, and wait for reinforcements to be sent out. Then if you're quick you can sneak in after you dispatch them.

ESSENTIAL GAME
GHOST SQUAD

Sega AM2's counter-terrorism lightgun game was a true arcade great. While the action wasn't too different to the likes of *Virtua Cop*, your route through each stage is determined by the tasks you choose to tackle, from disarming bombs to freeing hostages. Experience earned by completing stages opens up more routes and new weaponry, with your progress saved to an IC card in the arcade. This is the only home conversion of the game, and it's a steal as it can be readily had for less than £5 at present.

Wii Zapper

» PLATFORM: Wii **» YEAR:** 2007
» COST: £19.99 (launch), £10+ (today, boxed with game), £5+ (today, unboxed)

At one point in time, you could be forgiven for thinking that Nintendo was distancing itself from weapons – after all, the N64 and GameCube were the only consoles of their generations not to host any lightgun games. As a result, it was truly surprising that the Wii became the genre's home-console stronghold. This was no accident, though. The Wii Remote's pointer functions allowed it to function similarly to a lightgun, while traditional lightguns were incompatible with the vast majority of high-definition TVs, which other consoles supported.

Much like the Wii Wheel, the Wii Zapper showcases the versatility of the Wii's control system. It is essentially just a plastic frame for the Wii Remote and Nunchuk and contains no electronics at all, with its main purpose being to enhance your grip and therefore your aim. As a result, the Wii Zapper has been cloned and imitated by numerous third-party peripheral manufacturers. It's supported by quite a few games, such as *Target: Terror*, *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles*, *Dead Space: Extraction* and *The House Of The Dead: Overkill*.

Wii Zapper fact

■ The Wii Zapper was never released as a stand-alone peripheral in Europe or North America – it was only sold as a bundle with the game *Link's Crossbow Training*.

> To me, it was absolutely clear that the future of toys was electronics. You knew that people weren't gonna be satisfied with LEDs that made beep and boop sounds
>
> John Newcomer

» *Joust* creator John Newcomer says he hatched the idea for his classic coin-op game because psychologically, people "wish they could fly".

JOHN NEWCOMER

The Williams classic coin-op hit Joust kicked off John Newcomer's 40-year-career of making games that has hatched titles for new audiences of players outside of arcades and inspired some of the industry's biggest franchises

Words by Danny Gallagher

Toy-turned-videogame designer John Newcomer pitched his first game *Joust* to Williams in 1981 when no one knew how to program a flying object or animate the flapping of an ostrich's wings. John thought that arcades needed to do more than cater to the players already coming into the arcade to play the stuff they already know is popular. It's an idea that John has pursued for the majority of his career with games like *High Impact Football* aimed at sports fans who didn't play *Donkey Kong*, the table-top touch screen arcade cabinet *TouchMaster* designed for casual gamers, and many more.

» A row of *Joust* machines at Free Play Arcade in Richardson, Texas.

How did you start your career as a toy designer?
I had an industrial design background and knew a bit about psychology and mechanical engineering and design, all kind of mixed together. That's pretty much how they did it in the toy inventing industry and it was like a secret society. Everybody thought [that] Kenner and Parker Bros came up with were their own [ideas]. They didn't. They had their own internal group and sometimes they did [create their own ideas] or they did a line extension of things. A lot of times the original idea came from these inventing groups. Marvin Glass and Associates was the most-known one and they were in Chicago. It's like Chicago is this magical place with Marvin Glass, Mother's Arcade, Williams, etc.

At any rate, [board game designer] Gordon Barlow was one of the senior partners and it was after Marvin Glass himself died that the place was run by five senior partners of the company. He broke off and started his own firm in Skokie, a suburb of Chicago and was most famous for doing *Mouse Trap* but he had over 100 patents. He had this book in his office of patents and it was huge. He had done a lot of games and stuff. It was really weird. There was a small group of middle-aged people in their 40s or late-40s and here comes this little punk in his 20s and we had very different personalities but he sort of took me under his wing. Part of it was I was really good at game strategy and I could come up with them mostly because of my chess background and I memorised every toy that came out and that's because my mom never threw away her wish books. I studied toys and knew that's what I wanted to do.

What are some of the toys you helped design or create?
I think like a designer, where I'm turned on by figuring out problems. If it was a preschool toy or something cooler for boys, [Barlow] taught me that it was a business and to think like that and look for holes in the market. Sometimes he'd go make a tour of inventing firms, or come up with a couple of games or [tell us] Ideal was looking for a preschool toy. He called us a think tank because he allowed us to think of anything we wanted. We pitched a magic trick idea to Doug Henning once and these guys we were with were friends with Evel Knievel. We weren't gonna tell him how to do stunts but he wanted us to come up with some ideas [for toys] with his name on them.

What made you decide to move from designing toys to designing videogames?
To me, it was absolutely clear that the future of toys was electronics. You knew that people weren't gonna be satisfied with LEDs that made beep and boop sounds. It was really clear if you were looking at what was going on with arcades, especially when *Space Invaders* came out and *Galaxian*. You just knew this is what toys and games were all gonna be, even as so far to go in that they would eventually get more memory and do more stuff and become interactive movies. It was pretty obvious back then where it was gonna go.

Did you expect *Joust* to have the longevity and popularity that it has now?
Back then I think with just about anybody you would talk to, the honest answer would be surprise that a lot of these games would still be remembered and played after 40 years. A lot of that is just the fans and players who kept it alive and then the arcade took a different form where now it's a bar and you just

> Nobody in management wanted to do a sports game and none of them played sports. There weren't that many people in engineering who played sports
>
> John Newcomer

Photo Credit: Lonnie McDonald

» iD Software cofounder and Oculus Chief Tech Officer John Carmack, right, celebrates *Joust*'s 40th anniversary with *Joust* creator John Newcomer, in Texas.

» [Arcade] One of the more interesting projects that John was involved with is *Revolution X*, a bizarre lightgun shooter that revolves around the American rock band Aerosmith.

▶ pay a cover charge and don't have to worry about fishing 25 cents out of someone's pocket anymore. Maybe there's some force that could have foreseen that. I think most people were expecting a lot of these games to evolve. The hardware's going to get better and eventually there's going to be metaverse type stuff and interactive movies, but I thought that maybe some of the simple forms would still be around and that is where *Joust* maybe would have a chance. One of the pillars was to be doing something different.

Did you just want to do a crazy idea with *Joust* or decide to come up with the game first and build something from that?
I came from a toy inventing background and our process was totally different from what was going on in the videogame industry. I'm using my same thought processes on how to come up with ideas because we had to constantly generate ideas. And we didn't have the internet back then. I would've given anything to have the internet then. So my internet was my frayed library card and I knew when I made the transition, I knew I wanted to have a couple of basic ideas in my back pocket and in some different categories because I didn't know what might be picked or what direction they would want to go. I knew everything that was in the arcade and I knew what all the popular toys were and I knew a contact in Japan so I knew a lot of what they were doing also.

The concept behind *Joust* is quite novel. How did you decide on having knights ride ostriches?
With one exception, I've always visualised every game I've worked on that I've been able to play in my head. [That means] I know what it looks like and I can make a couple of sketches, or what I would usually do is just write a short description and say here's what I'm thinking and fill in some holes. If it ever made it to the next step, then the description would be a little bit longer so I could share the vision from there. How it became ostriches is a different story.

Originally, it was supposed to be more "bred for combat" and actually *Avatar* cut really close when it had the mountain banshees on the floating island. It was supposed to be more fanciful birds that were bred for combat and then having a rider and getting into more of a medieval thing. I was just thinking it through

FIVE TO PLAY

John relishes the opportunity to find new audiences for games. Here are some titles he worked on that did just that

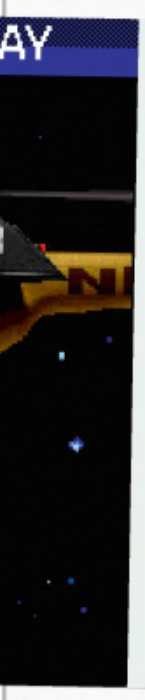
JOUST
Year: 1982
■ John's first videogame was released by Williams in 1982. It looks simple but it's actually a strategy game featuring knights on flying ostriches trying to outmanoeuvre opponents by landing on top of them and turning them into eggs that they have to collect before they hatch. A sequel was released in 1986.

SINISTAR
Year: 1983
■ John joined this top-down space shooter in mid-development and originally called it *Juggernaut*. The game's titular boss who first appeared in arcades in 1983 could roar and taunt players with memorable lines like "Beware, I live!", "I hunger, coward!", "Run! Run! Run", and "I am Sinistar!"

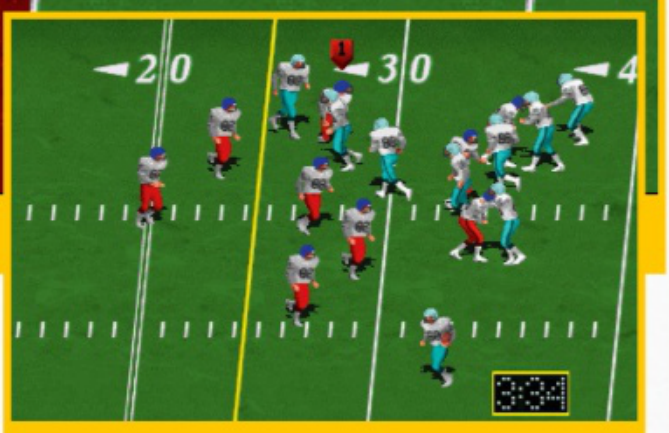
NARC
Year: 1988
■ John helped Eugene Jarvis design the look of this gritty, violent side-scrolling shooter released in 1988. The game put players in control of two gun-toting crime fighters named Max Force and Hit Man who are on a mission to take down a series of dangerous drug kingpins.

HIGH IMPACT FOOTBALL
Year: 1990
■ Sports wasn't a genre that Williams really explored but John knew there was an audience for them with this football arcade game that debuted in 1990. The game wasn't successful but it opened new avenues for future classics like *NBA Jam* and *NFL Blitz*.

TOUCHMASTER
Year: 1996
■ This tabletop, touch-screen game for bars and restaurants came from John's attempt to find players who didn't hang out in arcades. The first cabinet came with 11 games including a basketball game called *Hot Hoops* and playing-card games like *Target 21* and *Peak Perfection*.



» [Arcade] John filmed all of the models for the sports arcade game *High Impact Football*.



» [Arcade] *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon posed for all of the players on the field for *High Impact Football*.

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **JOUST** [1982] ARCADE
- **SINISTAR** [1983] ARCADE
- **TURKEY SHOOT** [1984] ARCADE
- **JOUST 2: SURVIVAL OFTHE FITTEST** [1986] ARCADE
- **NARC** [1988] ARCADE
- **TRI-SPORTS** [1989] ARCADE
- **HIGH IMPACT FOOTBALL** [1990] ARCADE
- **GILLIGAN'S ISLAND PINBALL** [1991] PINBALL
- **SUPER HIGH IMPACT** [1991] ARCADE
- **REVOLUTION X** [1994] ARCADE
- **TOUCHMASTER** [1996] ARCADE
- **MOTOGP** [2003] MOBILE
- **MIDNIGHT MYSTERIES: THE EDGAR ALLAN POE CONSPIRACY** [2009] PC, NINTENDO DS

» [Arcade] John's *TouchMaster* machine had 11 touch-screen games for bar and restaurant customers who didn't usually go to arcades. The series eventually moved to Nintendo's DS.

like, "OK, so do you have the wings or are you carrying somebody?" and that's where it works out better when you can knock somebody off the birds and things started evolving. Plus, I wanted the player to have the power to fly and walk on a surface as part of the strategy. Beneath it all, it's a strategy game.

Wasn't there an idea for a game based on *War Of The Worlds* at one point?
War Of The Worlds was one I was pitching hard. They were all really rough sketches. They were all supposed to be like that to see what would get a glimmer from somebody because I was trying to explore a different genre and obviously a lot of technical work would have to go into it. I wanted something where you could use extra parts and it was in their best interest to do a game that could use a lot of parts so they could use them up, which is part of the pride of being able to do something unique without having to redesign it. We were using all the existing technology and then people pushed it with what they could make.

» [Arcade] John says he and his team studied the flight habits of birds from photos to figure out how to animate *Joust*'s memorable flying ostriches.

How did your involvement with *Sinistar* come about?
There wasn't even a name for [the game]. [Game co-creator and programmer Sam Dicker] had a top-down spaceship that he made out of graph paper. He had the star background that ended up in the game. That's all he had for a long period of time. So because it was a space game, upper management didn't know what to do about it. That was one of the things I was brought on board for. If people were stuck for ideas, I could come up with solutions and stuff.

How do you generate your ideas?
If you want to generate ideas, read books like crazy. I read comic books and fantasy books and went to a library and read books like crazy. Then you list things and you don't talk yourself out of things. When you've got a bunch of stuff, scratch off the stuff that doesn't ring a bell and gradually you form a picture. I don't know how other people do this, but I can picture any game in my head and design it. I would have my list and look at the wall and play the game in my head. Then the writing of the design document took me like a day because I just wrote what I saw in my head. I called it *Juggernaut*. [Williams designer] Noah Falstein came to the company and he was being hired as a lead programmer and I forget how it happened. He was supposed to take over the *Juggernaut* project. He was gonna lead the programming team and I was doing some management also because I was supposed to form an art team and I don't remember all the chain of events. Noah and I talked about it and he used it as a blueprint and used a lot of it. Then he was given a team and I felt very comfortable with Noah because he was used to brainstorming. He worked at Milton Bradley and they were doing the precursor to console games. More or less, there was a team that gelled because I hired a painter who took to doing pixel work very well. Jack Haegar, he did all the art for the game. He and the team worked a bit on the look and I thought that was really cool to see. They took it, gave it more and they gave this character a more memorable look.

Who came up with the new name *Sinistar*?
Noah, he's a very funny guy. He does a lot of puns and he came up with the name *Sinistar* and as soon as he came up with that, that's it. This is a much better name [than *Juggernaut*]. So really, it was a project that was very unique and it took steps to get it out the door.

What made you decide to try a sports game with *High Impact Football*?
Nobody in management wanted to do a sports game and none of them played sports. There weren't that many people in engineering who played sports [laughs]. So that was a hard

TOUCHING ON THE TOUCHMASTER

■ The bar-top arcade cabinet *TouchMaster* was one of John's many ideas that came from his philosophy of taking risks on new audiences who weren't being reached by big hits like *Defender*, *NBA Jam* or *Mortal Kombat*.

"So then it was, 'Well, is there something we can do to hit bars and restaurants?' and that was the one thing sales kept asking for and it's a whole different market segment," John says. "My attitude was let's try and see what happens. Maybe this'll morph into something else or become something new."

The first in the series was released in 1996 featuring a mix of card, simple action and word games operated on a touch screen instead of a joystick. Seven new cabinets with new game collections followed from 1997-2000, including several releases for Nintendo's DS.

"I liked taking that on because that was new," John says. "To work on something where you're taking a little bit of a chance and trying to do something different in the company, that actually served me very well because I became an expert in casual games."

» [Arcade] The haunting voice of *Sinistar* could be heard in arcades across the country following its release in 1983.

» [Arcade] John did some of the artwork on the Williams crime-themed shoot-'em-up *NARC*.

sell right off the bat. But independently, Eugene [Jarvis] had pitched them a football game and they agreed to it and the game that Warren [Davis] and I were working on was just starting to come along and they killed that game and put me onto *NARC* so it would become faster.

At the time, I was an athlete and I played sports all the time. We had a softball team and a basketball team. So I was pitching doing sports too for awhile and kept getting shot down. Finally, I think it was exclusively down to Ed Boon. He wanted to quit doing pinball games and start doing videogames and doing a sports game interested him. Eugene and I got together with Ed Boon. So we had a team that was interested finally in doing sports and then it could take off.

So what happened next?

I did all the filming of the football players doing stuff on the field. I came up with the animation list and I would film Ed. It was easy to explain to him why we're doing this and we could link them together. He was all the players on the field. We isolated the jerseys to change the colour palette. We could get some models to do these close-ups of big, scary body builder types but the guys on the field were Ed Boon.

What happened with the game's release?

What ticked me off about the whole thing is because they wouldn't get an NFL licence and then they put Eugene off on a different project, and my recollection could be wrong, but we missed the start of the football season and that killed us. The distributors by that time started making cabinets and they wouldn't buy it because they were afraid we'd miss the football season. It's a crime because the thing about the game, all three of us understood is you're getting four quarters at a time and we absolutely shattered every other game that was tested at Williams Bally Midway. I think we doubled the best highest game. We made hundreds more at arcade test locations than anybody else.

We proved we were right and the timing was wrong. [Game designer and *NBA Jam* creator] Mark Turmell understood that and he was already to go with Boon with basketball. It was actually a better call because people play basketball all year long so it didn't have that weakness that football had because the game continued to rack up monster numbers two months after the football season but it didn't matter. They would've made their money back but you can't argue with someone that if you could've gotten that in July and August, we would've been ready for football season. So *NBA Jam* was the better bet and proved sports could sell and Mark didn't have to fight that battle. I think his only battle was getting them to spend money on the NBA [licensing].

What did *High Impact Football* achieve with its release?

The proudest thing about *High Impact Football* was it opened the door despite all the naysayers at the top. Listen to us. We actually play games

» [Arcade] *Mortal Kombat* became a huge success and remains an immensely popular franchise today. It has come a long way from the early demo John mentions.

and watch what people are doing out there and just because you don't play games doesn't mean they won't do well.

One time I said, "Let's show them a demo of two digitised guys fighting." So I took two characters and one guy looked like he was walking and the other guy looked like he was throwing a punch. I was all excited. I set up a demo and Eugene and I got shot down and even while I was doing *NARC*, I tried showing a little pitch [to show] what this hardware system could do with a fighting game. I was tickled to see [*Mortal Kombat* creators] Boon and [John] Tobias finally win that battle.

It seems your games paved the way for hits like *NBA Jam* and *Mortal Kombat*.
Someone had to champion them to get them through. Getting stuff approved was not easy until the first one of them became successful. Management [could be reluctant] because they didn't play games or they just looked at what games were selling out there and that's it. Some of what they were doing was gauging to see how persistent they were and if you can get someone else behind you. I think they were measuring guile (laughs). On all those games that were successful, the teams were passionate about it. They were trying to push the envelope and do something cool that would be remembered. I can also see on the business side, everyone wants a sure thing. I've always made the statement that the surest thing about not taking a risk is the biggest risk of all.

They found a game that worked and did a bunch of sequels of *NBA Jam* and a bunch of sequels of *Mortal Kombat*. What was going to arcades was a bunch of sequels and I'm sure they were lining pockets of investors but they also have to try something different. When they were thinking about *NARC* and that hardware system, they were actually thinking of a hardware system that could last them for eight years or whatever. Then it was, "We've gotta worry about doing stuff in 3D." That was the only time they really thought about doing something that was gonna last us for a while. ✱

> "I've always made the statement that the surest thing about not taking a risk is the biggest risk of all"
> John Newcomer

STICK 'EM WITH THE POINTY END

Joust's world champion on how to beat John's iconic game

■ Lonnie McDonald of Grand View, Missouri, has the highest score in the world and the most high scores on *Joust* machines. He's scored the maximum allowable points on 283 *Joust* machines and chronicles his journey to jousting glory at Joustmaster.com Here are his essential playing tips.

1. FLYING IS DYING
■ "Track only what you need to track. Make it strategic so [the enemies are] coming to you and you're defeating them on their terms. If you wanna have fun, fly around. If you wanna defeat the game, play at the bottom."

2. PLAY PROTECTED
■ "When things are coming down to you, you can defeat them because they're committing to an angle. Go out to the left and go out to the right to kill things but stay as protected as you can."

3. BE CONSISTENT
■ "Most of the time what you're gonna find is if you can start at the bottom in the same spot. I usually start with my back foot on the left edge. I'll move, but what I'm trying to do is create a consistent pattern so you're getting them to come out in a repeatable pattern."

4. BE PATIENT
■ "Always let them come down to you if you can. It'll become like second nature."

5. WATCH FOR THE DOWNWARD ARCH
■ "What will happen is when you get to the Shadow Lords (aka the blue guys), they'll commit to a downward arch and that's when you defeat them. They're falling so you defeat them when they're falling."

6. LOOK OUT, THEY'RE COMING FROM BEHIND!
■ "You're sitting on the edge of the ledge where [the Shadow Lords are] coming. If you're going, 'I'm gonna kill this Shadow Lord,' you really want to make sure there's not another Shadow Lord coming from behind to kill you. There are some evil geniuses who programmed them."

7. GO FOR THE ODD ONE OUT
■ "If you have an odd one of a different colour, visually it will throw you off and they'll come in at an angle you're not expecting. So take the odd one out."

A. THUNDER
12TH
4

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2

"YOU CAN'T STOP THE THUNDERBOLT!"

» DREAMCAST » 2000
» MIDWAY STUDIOS SAN DIEGO

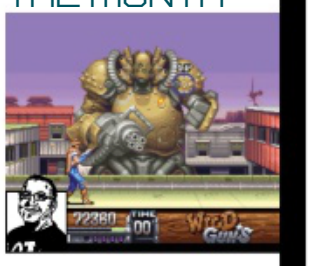
Nothing spices up a family get-together like someone getting punched in the face, which is why my dad recently invited us over to watch the boxing. By the end of the night, all we could talk about was how Anthony Joshua had snatched humiliation from the jaws of dignity, with post-match antics that tainted what had been a great effort. However, during the undercard fights my dad had been chatting to my sister's boyfriend about EA's old *Fight Night* series, and I ended up thinking about when I last got into any boxing games. For a moment, largely because I'd forgotten about the Wii *Punch-Out!!* game, I thought it was *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2*.

I first encountered the original *Ready 2 Rumble* on a Dreamcast demo pod, and after getting over the disappointment of it not being *Sonic Adventure*, I quickly came to enjoy the arcade-style gameplay and outlandish characters. When I saw the sequel available at a good price, I had to take the plunge and I was rewarded for doing so. The secret characters included the likes of Bill Clinton and a juiced up Michael Buffer, and the special moves were even more over the top – you could genuinely knock your opponent clean out of the ring.

Sometimes, I don't think the *Ready 2 Rumble* games get their due as a part of Midway's arcade sports heritage. Though it doesn't have the official league licences that the likes of *NBA Jam* and *NFL Blitz* did, it does have all of the exaggerated action, amusing voice clips and crazy secrets to fit right in with them. If that sounds like your idea of a good time, forget that the awful Wii revival exists and go play this for a bit. It's not incredibly long but it's good fun while it lasts, and hey – how many other games allow you to punch Michael Jackson in the face?

>> Dudes! We've rocked the totally radical Cowabunga Collection this month, played through Namco's gnarly remake of Pac-Man World and been completely shell-shocked by Kirby's latest spin-off. Sod talking like this, it's exhausting!

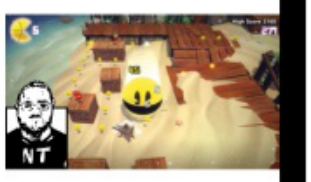
PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Wild Guns

Strictly Limited Games' reissue of *Wild Guns* just arrived so I once again own a legitimate version of the hideously expensive SNES classic.



NICK

Pac-Man World Re-Pac

It was always a fairly standard platformer, but I found it weirdly compelling as a teenager and still do today.

» [Xbox Series X] *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters* is highly underrated, so it's great to see it getting plenty of love here.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Cowabunga Collection

IS DIGITAL ECLIPSE'S NEW COMPILATION TURTLE-LY AWESOME?

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** XBOX SERIES X
- **ALSO ON:** PC, PS4, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

It feels like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have been everywhere this year, and Digital Eclipse's excellent new compilation does little to dispel that feeling.

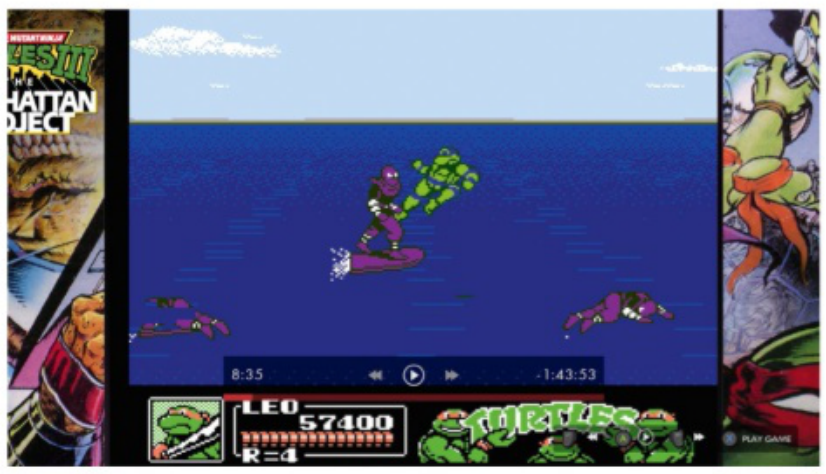
Rather than tackle the entire timeline of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* games (*TMNT* hereafter), Digital Eclipse has largely chosen to focus on the games of the Eighties and Nineties, which makes sense as it's arguably where most of the memorable titles are found.

An impressive 13 games are included, ranging from Konami's original arcade hit to the seemingly forgotten Game Boy adventures and the underrated *TMNT: Tournament Fighters*. While a few games like *Turtles In Time* and *Tournament Fighters* do share alternate versions, they're different enough to feel like brand-new experiences when you play them. Digital Eclipse has also included the Japanese versions of each game as well where they're available – it's a really nice touch, as some are quite different to their US counterparts.

It's a good mix of games as well. While scrolling fighters do make up the bulk of the collection, there's also the aforementioned *Tournament Fighters* and *TMNT III: Radical Rescue*, an engaging *Metroid*-style adventure that really pushes the Game Boy and proves to be one of the collection's highlights. Konami's original NES game also makes the cut and it's nowhere near as difficult as the internet would have you believe, it is a lot of fun, though.

The emulation, as you'd expect from Digital Eclipse, is very good and each game feels very authentic. While it does feel like there's a tiny bit of input lag in some games, nothing hampered

» [Xbox Series X] Watch mode is an amazing feature. It's a great way of skipping past hard parts of a game.

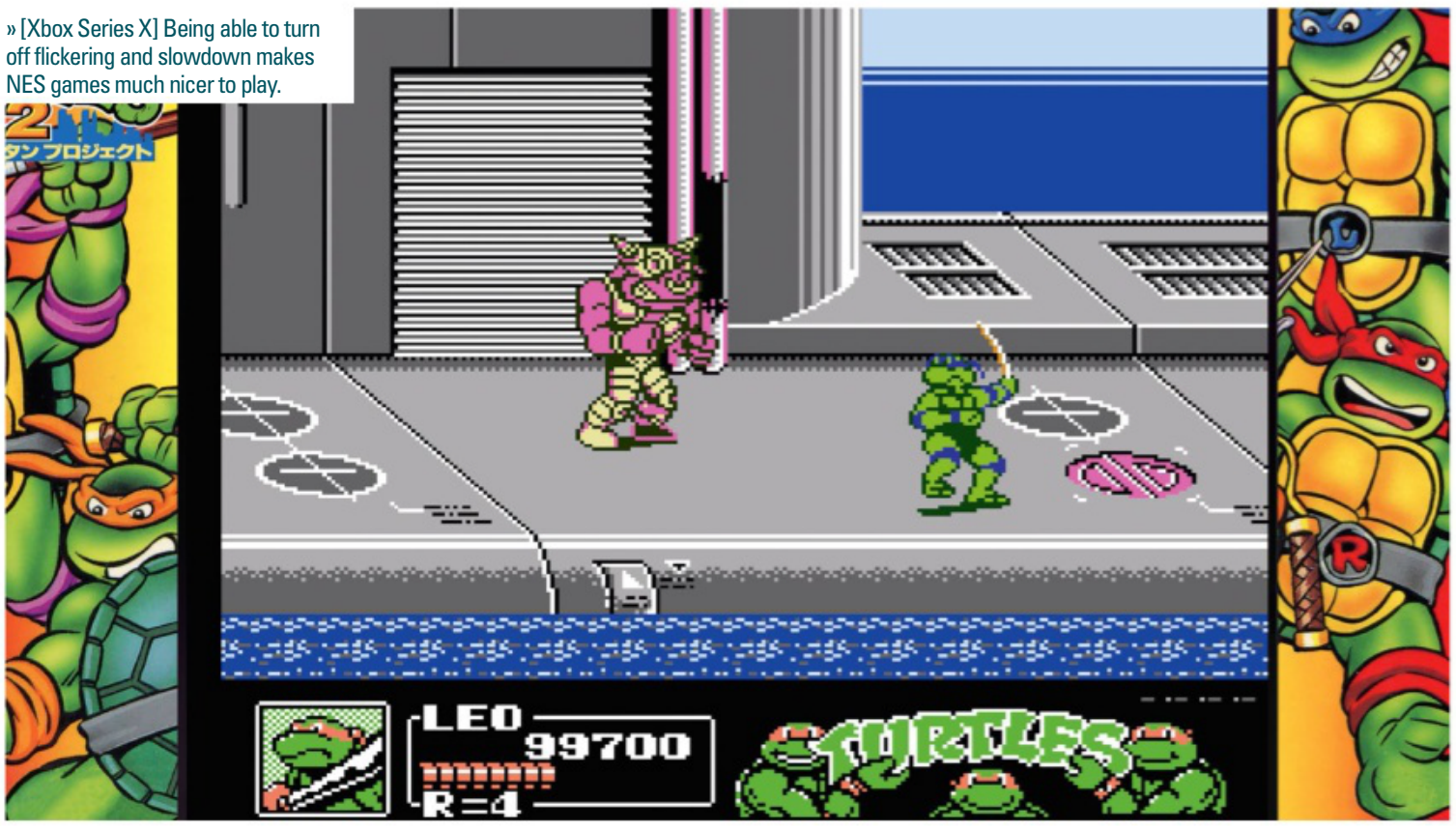


BRIEF HISTORY

» Digital Eclipse started off in 1992 and quickly built a name for itself by creating excellent emulated versions of *Joust*, *Defender* and *Robotron: 2084* on Mac. While it continued to convert classic games to various systems it also began dabbling in the handheld games market, often working on licensed games. In more recent years it has placed its focus back on retro gaming and has released a number of acclaimed compilations, including *Mega Man Legacy Collection*, *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* and the incoming *Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection*.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES** (ARCADE)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TURTLES IN TIME:** (ARCADE)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES** (NES)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE ARCADE GAME** (NES)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: THE MANHATTAN PROJECT** (NES)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: FALL OF THE FOOT CLAN** (GAME BOY)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: BACK FROM THE SEWERS** (GAME BOY)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: RADICAL RESCUE** (GAME BOY)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME** (SNES)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE HYPERSTONE HEIST** (MEGA DRIVE)
- **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS** (MEGA DRIVE, NES, SNES)



» [Xbox Series X] Being able to turn off flickering and slowdown makes NES games much nicer to play.

play for us. Numerous scaling options are available, as well as various filters, including an excellent monitor option, which generally made everything look really good (we preferred the LCD filter for Game Boy games). It's a shame we couldn't find an option to emulate the greens of the original Game Boy screen, but it's a small quibble and it didn't ruin our enjoyment.

Another nice touch is that Digital Eclipse has included online play for the included arcade games as well as the SNES version of *Tournament Fighters* and *The Hyperstone Heist* on Mega Drive. Although there aren't many lobby options to speak of, the netcode seems really solid and we had no problem joining or starting games.

While Digital Eclipse is well-known for its excellent emulation skills, it's not the only reason why the company's collections are so coveted. The California-based developer loves going the extra mile and it's decided to travel that little bit further for *The Cowabunga Collection*.

Every single game (with the exception of the Japanese version of *Radical Rescue*) has various Enhancements, which are designed to either improve how the game runs or make it easier to play. The NES games, for example, have options to stop them flickering and eliminate slowdown, while the arcade games feature God modes which allow you to kill enemies with a single hit. While some game's selections are quite miserly, there's normally plenty to fiddle around with and they can often make quite a difference to how the game plays, which further lengthens the replay value of Digital Eclipse's compilation.

The Cowabunga Collection is also notable for including Digital Eclipse's unique Watch feature, a truly clever piece of technical engineering that allows you to watch a complete runthrough of every game on the collection and join in at any point, continuing the action wherever you paused it. It impressed us mightily when we first encountered it in the developer's *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection* and it's just as useful here. Other quality-of-life improvements include the ability to rewind during play, the option to save your game at any time and also the ability to customise controls across all games. They're base things we expect to see in most modern compilations and we're always impressed by the lengths Digital Eclipse goes to in order to make its compilations as accessible as possible.

Equally impressive is Turtles' Lair, a huge selection of memorabilia and extras about the famous reptiles that covers everything from box art, manuals and comics, to classic adverts and stills from the various TV shows. There is a huge amount of material to trawl through here and it's comprehensive enough that even non-*TMNT* fans should be interested in it.

While it's a pity that a few more games couldn't cater for online play and that none of the later *Turtles* games are included – we'd have loved access to the expensive GBA releases – this is still a painstakingly created collection that offers great value for money and plenty of hours of gameplay. In all honesty it's hard to see how anyone will be disappointed with it. ✱

In a nutshell

Digital Eclipse delivers another gorgeous compilation filled with a carefully curated selection of games, great historical content and high-quality emulation.

>> Score **85%**

✱ WHY NOT TRY

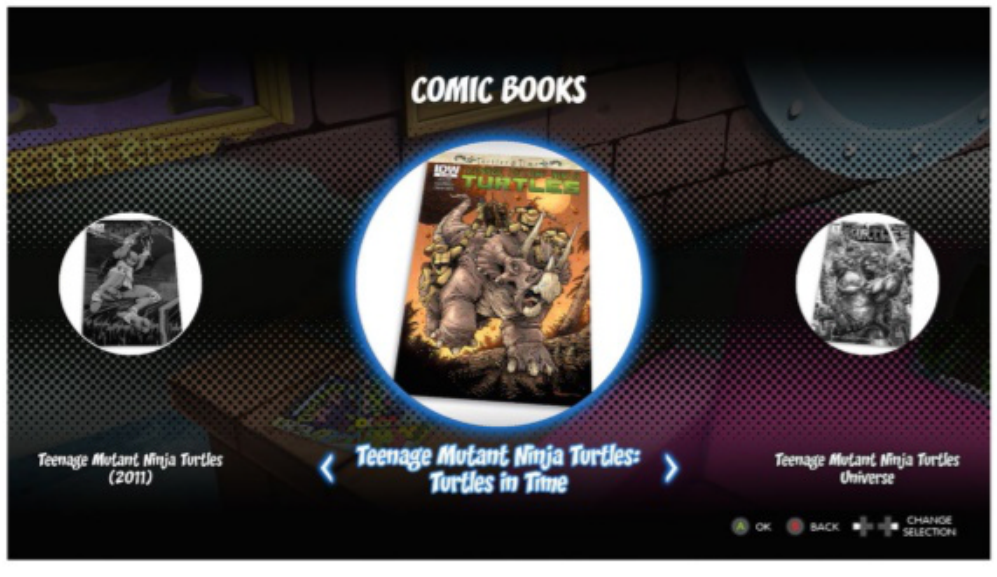
▼ SOMETHING OLD

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (GBA)

▼ SOMETHING NEW

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE (VARIOUS)

» [Xbox Series X] Here's the original arcade game without a filter and with the monitor filter applied. We definitely prefer the latter.



» [Xbox Series X] You don't get to read the entire comics, but it's still nice seeing all the covers.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Yars: Recharged

» System: Switch (tested) PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC **» Buy it for:** £7.99 **» Buy it from:** Online

We've been thoroughly enjoying Atari's *Recharged* series and the latest game is one of the best yet. Unlike a lot of the earlier games, which have sometimes stayed a little too close to the source material, *Yars: Recharged* feels a lot more refreshing and does feel like it's pushing a few more boundaries than normal.

While it now features twin-stick controls, elements of *Yars: Recharged* do stay the same. You still control a winged protagonist, you still have to take out the evil Qotile, you still have to navigate a barrier that stands between you and your prize, and you still need to use the Zorlon Cannon to defeat Qotile while avoiding the deadly Swirl it fires at you.

This time though, levels are far more intricate in their design and you'll often have to deal with multiple Qotiles, barriers of different strengths and numerous gun emplacements as you tackle each stage. While your standard weapon is pretty weak you can also cause more damage by nibbling turrets and barriers. Take a turret out and you'll be given a temporary power-up that will let you cause even more damage. Defeating enemies and the barrier also grant you orbs which will power the Zorlon Cannon. Stages soon get quite tricky as you work out the quickest way to solve your goal.

While the Arcade mode and multiplayer are enjoyable enough, the real entertainment of *Yars: Recharged* can be found in Missions mode (which also caters for multiplayer play), as it has some truly devious map designs to master. The Switch version does suffer from some minor performance issues and the difficulty feels a little unfair on some of the later stages, but it can't hide the fact that *Yars: Recharged* is a fresh take on one of Atari's oldest action games.

» Score **78%**

» [Switch] Those white barriers are hard to break so getting to the Qotile won't be easy.

» [Switch] You're impervious to all things when using the shield on the far left, except for the deadly Swirl.

Kirby's Dream Buffet

» System: Switch **» Buy it for:** £13.49
» Buy it from: Online

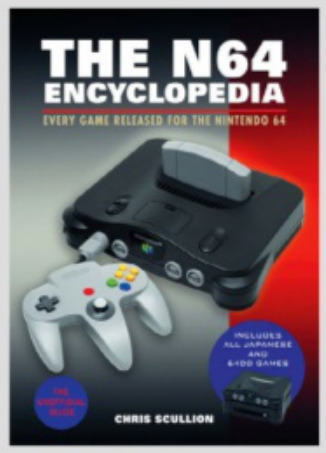
Kirby is nothing if not versatile and his latest spin-off is a fun take on *Fall Guys* where you roll around food-themed courses in an attempt to collect more strawberries than your opponents. Eating fruit increases your size and your speed, so nab as many berries as you can. Designed for local and online play, each Gourmet Grand Prix consists of two obstacle courses, a crazy fruit-collecting minigame and a final Battle Royale where you must collect strawberries and hinder your opponents. It's chaotic fun and is only really let down by some spotty online netcode. There are plenty of collectibles based on past games and the whole thing is rather charming, if a little light on content.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **74%**

The N64 Encyclopedia: Every Game Released For The Nintendo 64

» Buy it for: £30
» Buy it from: pen-and-sword.co.uk



Chris Scullion's latest console encyclopaedia is possibly his best yet. You can tell that he has a lot of love for the console and the writing is breezy and enjoyable as always, but this time it has a bit more room to breathe. Since the N64's library is relatively small, each game is generally afforded more space within the book's 256 pages than might otherwise be the case. This means that you usually get important information such as alternative releases and platform comparisons, though it's still sometimes possible to come away from an entry not knowing if a game is actually any good or not. It's also the most comprehensive of his books so far, as Japanese games and 64DD games are included.

NICK THORPE

Pac-Man World Re-Pac

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PC **» Buy it for:** £34.99
» Buy it from: Online, retail

This remake of the PlayStation platformer from 1999 appears to be little more than a new coat of paint, but there's more to it than that. As well as a visual overhaul, the game has a number of gameplay tweaks including difficulty adjustments, new moves, new enemy types and revised boss battles. Though these revisions provide an improved experience, the original game was enjoyable but never remarkable. Since the changes to the game ultimately feel like so much tinkering around the edges, there's only so far it can rise above the source material. It's best enjoyed by old fans, or newcomers looking for a bit of comfort-food platforming.

NICK THORPE

» Score **71%**

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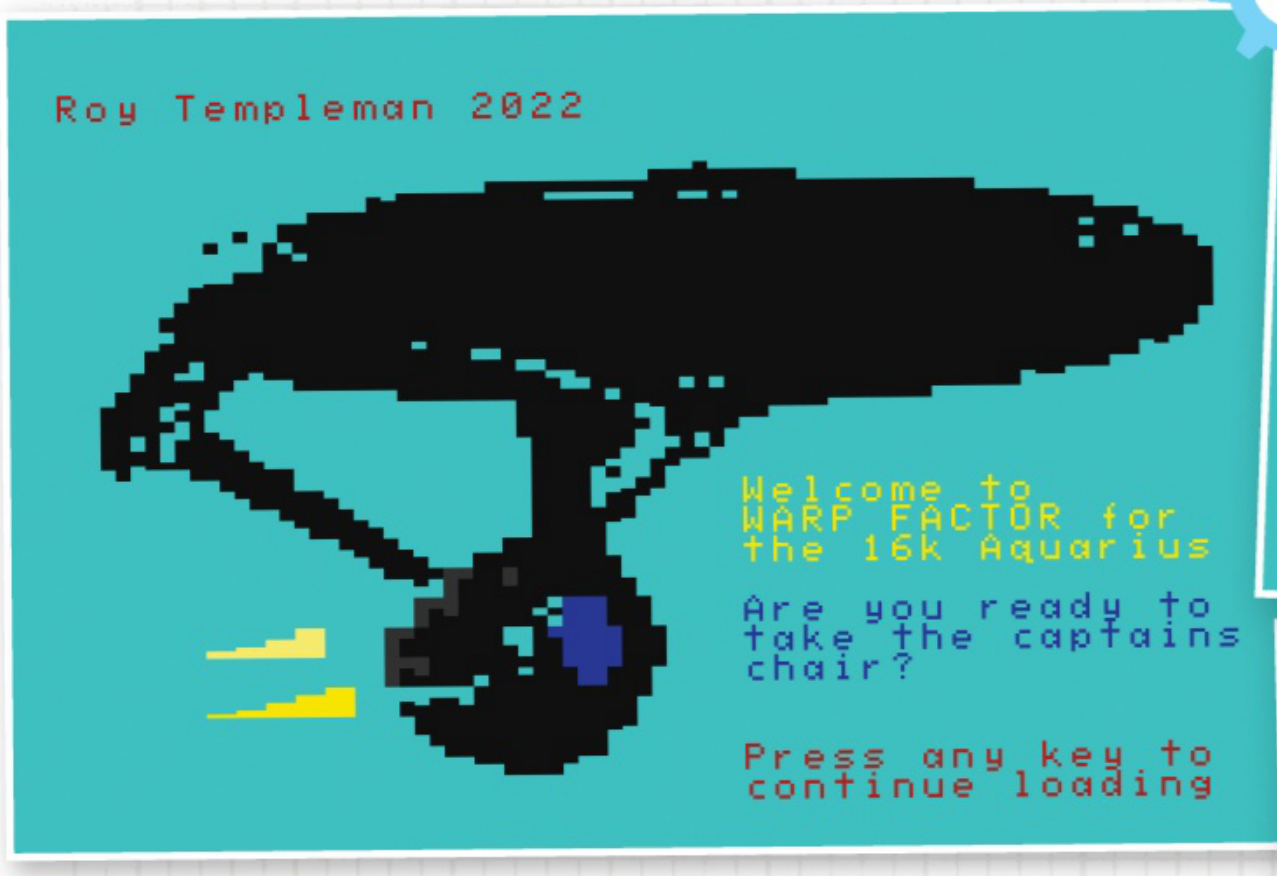
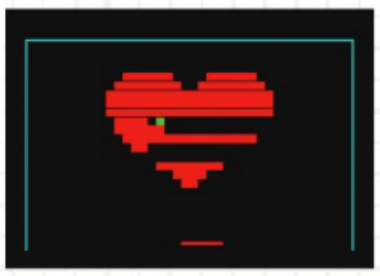
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

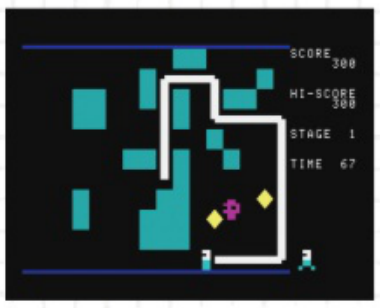
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- ROY TEMPLEMAN (LEFT) INSPIRED HEIDI TAYLOR (RIGHT, WITH SON JACOB) TO WRITE AQUARIUS GAMES. --->

<INTRO> A SINGLE TWEET FROM HEIDI TAYLOR (@AQUARIUSREVIVAL) GOT ME INTERESTED IN A FORMAT I DID NOT HAVE MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH – MATTEL'S AQUARIUS. YOU CAN READ ABOUT ITS RECENT HOMEBREW RENAISSANCE IN THIS ISSUE'S FEATURE. AND REMEMBER TO TWEET @RETROGAMER_MAG OR EMAIL RETROGAMER@FUTURENET.COM ABOUT YOUR HOMEBREW WORK TO FEATURE HERE. WE ALSO HAVE THE USUAL REVIEWS, NEWS, A PREVIEW OF A COOL-LOOKING ATARI 2600 GAME AND AN INTERVIEW WITH AN AMIGA LEGEND. KEEP IT RETRO! </INTRO>





<MAIN HEADER>

AGE OF AQUARIUS

<INTRO> THE SHORT-LIVED MATTEL COMPUTER IS SEEING MORE INTEREST AND A WAVE OF NEW GAMES </INTRO>

<BODY> **"My sister and I inherited one in 1989," says Heidi Taylor about Mattel's home computer.** "I picked the Aquarius back up sometime in 2015." Heidi is now developing new games, starting with *Bustout*. "Step one is literally pencil, pen, graph paper, a ruler, a colour code chart that I made for myself, the two programming guides that came with the system, and *The Aquarius Program Book by Peter Goode*," she begins. "Step two is a very cheap Windows laptop, Word and AquaLite for emulation. Step three, I put it on a good ol' fashioned tape to check sound and lag on an actual Aquarius with a CRT. If what I'm doing passes that test, I send it to my son Jacob – my beta tester. He's fascinated with what I'm up to and I think he loves videogames as much as I do."

Heidi was inspired by fellow Aquarius coder Roy Templeman. "I had always thought about creating some new Aquarius games, but life and work got in the way," Roy says. "When lockdown happened, I really started to get into the swing of it. By early 2020 I had finished *Aquariworm*. The first commercial cassette release for the Aquarius in over 30 years!" *Aquariworm* was published by Cronosoft, followed by *Doomsday Defender* and *Bomb Catcher 2*. What is Jon's development environment like? "I develop on Linux, using Sublime, TASM and an emulator running under Wine. I transfer it to my Micro Expander USB and load it onto real hardware to test. Then I create a CAQ file for fast loading, and a WAV file – initially from the laptop playing the WAV, but eventually from tape."

Cronosoft will be publishing Heidi's *Bustout* as well as Roy's *Warp Factor*. "I had been playing a remake of the Seventies *Star Trek* game," explains Roy. "I wanted to utilise the limited graphical and sound capabilities of the Aquarius – with simple but recognisable graphics (including a full-screen Klingon Bird Of Prey), sound, colour and a more descriptive

PLAY ME!

BUSTOUT

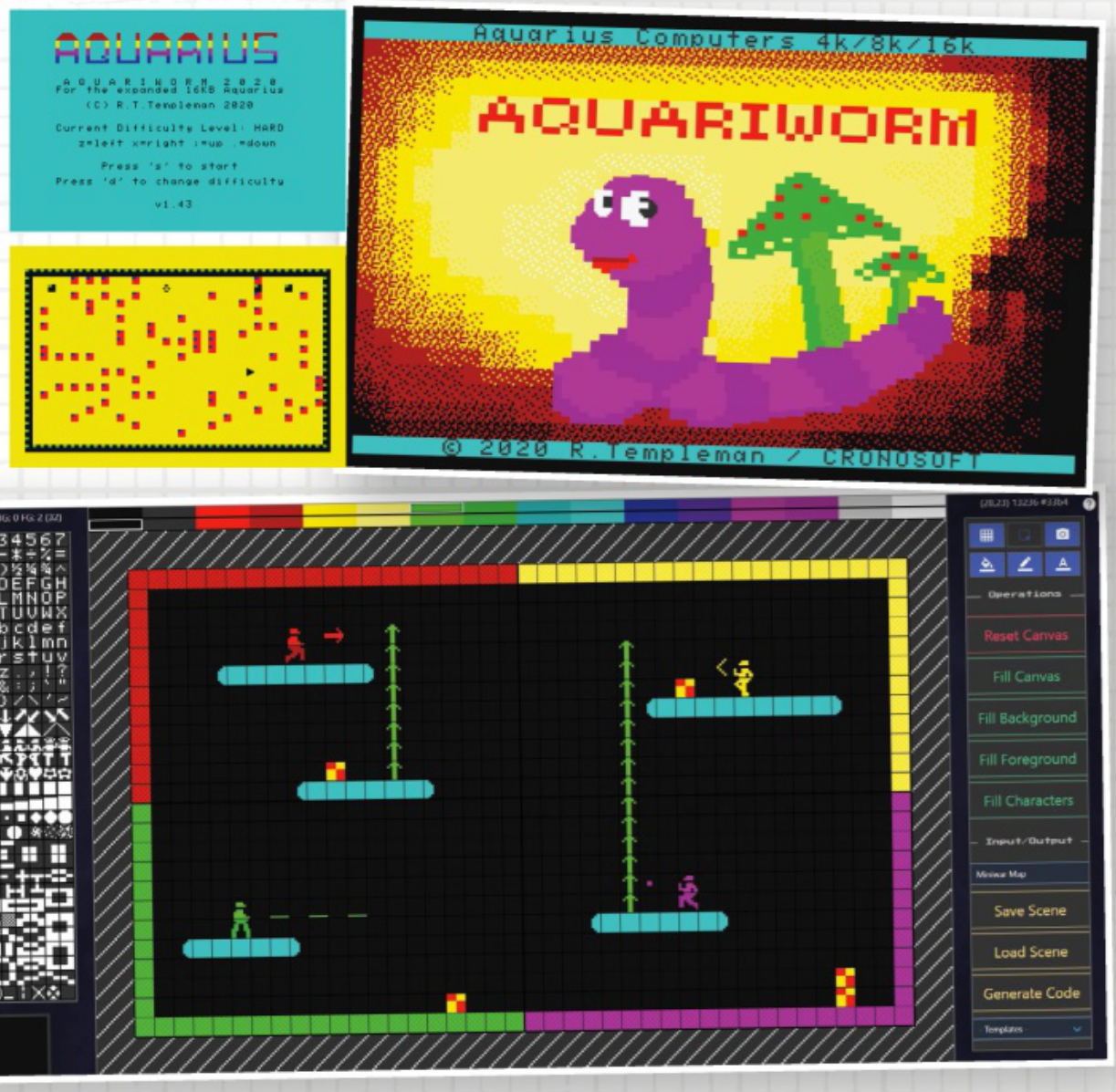
<Heidi's brand-new game is due to be released through Cronosoft. It pays tribute to Atari's coin-op hit *Breakout*, and features three different screens to demolish. />

CROSS HORDE

<Fabrizio Caruso's CrossLib (bit.ly/crosslib) allows him to compile to over 200 different retro computers. Five games have Aquarius versions, including zombie shooter *Cross Horde*. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- MATT PILZ'S AQUARIUS DRAW - AQUARIUS.MATTPILZ.COM - IS A BROWSER-BASED EDITOR FOR MAKING AQUARIUS GRAPHICS. --->

narrative. I also had help from Heidi, who has done a fantastic job of designing the cassette covers."

For hardware upgrades, the Micro Expander offers USB loading and an AY sound chip. Sean Harrington (aquarius.1stage.com) has a modding service, an RGB to HDMI board, and creates mock-up loading screens. Heidi promises that more games are imminent. "One is *Indiana Invaders* based on *Space Invaders*, the second game will be a puzzle game because the Aquarius can handle it, in theory – puzzles don't have a lot of action or movement, but it'll be complex enough to be fun." Roy has plans too. "I have been asked if I am planning *Aquariworm 2*, and I have a few ideas of what I could do to improve the original, so it is likely that I will begin work on that." </BODY>

<!--- MACK WHARTON CODED THIS AQUARIUS DEMO FOR THE RETRO COMPUTER FESTIVAL IN 2021. --->

<INTRO> FIVE AQUARIUS TITLES TO LOOK OUT FOR </INTRO>

DOOMSDAY DEFENDER

Defend Earth against an alien invasion in Roy Templeman's fun shoot-'em-up. Roy likes his shooters and this one looks ace. In Hard mode, you are protecting the White House itself.

RUPTUS

Japanese coder Inufuto (bit.ly/inufuto) has his own cross-compiler, targeting more than 40 retro systems. Aquarius releases include the brilliant *Bosconian*-style shoot-'em-up *Ruptus*.

TURMOIL

Eight Bit Milli Games ran a Kickstarter to create physical cartridges of this Aquarius conversion from Mark Turmell's Atari 2600 shoot-'em-up. It's at bit.ly/turmoil-aquarius

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: *Black Dawn Technomage* (above) is available to pre-order at bit.ly/bdtechno

Amstrad CPC: Mojon Twins released *Lala Prologue* with its updated Mk1 engine. Find it at bit.ly/lala-cpc

C64: Vector5Games released its new puzzle adventure game *Jungle Joe*, where you build ladders and bridges to explore the jungle and retrieve golden idols. It's at bit.ly/junglejoe

Game Boy: Incube8 Games is publishing *Dragonborne DX*, an updated version of Spacebot Interactive's RPG with enhanced graphics for Game Boy Color (and compatible with original Game Boy) plus a brand-new remastered soundtrack. Pre-order it at bit.ly/dragonbornedx

Master System: SMS Power marked the 25th anniversary of the console's European release with a coding competition. The results are available for all to see by visiting smspower.org/Competitions/Coding-2022

PICO-8: Recent releases include *Tutankham* from Paul Hammond (bit.ly/tutankham-pico) and the topical *Helitack Challenge* (bit.ly/helitack-pico) from Morning Toast where you put out forest fires and rescue lost hikers.

Various: polyplay.xyz has three new physical releases, each with an SD card containing emulator images – *Showdown* for MEGA65, *Beethoven's Revenge* for ZX Spectrum (48K/128K) and the brand-new point-and-click version of *The Curse Of Rabenstein* for the Commodore 64.

VIC-20: AJ Layden released the racing game *Super Monaco Grand Prix* (requires 16K) and shoot-'em-up *Rigel Attack* (8K expansion) via aj-layden.itch.io/ And RESET released Derek's brilliant new platformer *H3LP B0DG3* – bit.ly/h3lpb0dg3 (requires 35K expansion).

ZX Spectrum: *Tiny Crate* is the latest puzzle platformer from PCNONOGames. Get it by visiting bit.ly/tinycrate

CHAMPION CODER

RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

<INTRO> VETERAN PROGRAMMER RICHARD IS BACK WITH A THIRD RESHOOT GAME </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: GERMANY WEBSITE: RICHARD-LOEWENSTEIN.DE FORMAT: AMIGA RECENTLY CODED: TWINKY GOES HIKING (C64), RESHOOT R (AMIGA) DEVELOPING: RESHOOT PROXIMA 3 (AMIGA) />

WHAT IS YOUR AMIGA DEVELOPMENT SETUP?

<My unique cross-assembler toolchain on iMac. XCode is used as a powerful text editor and for version management. A script asks VASM to load the source, compile an executable, switch to emulator FS-UAE and start the game. It takes about one second to test code and jump directly to the position within the game that I need. />

WHAT MADE YOU CREATE THE RESHOOT SHOOT-'EM-UPS?

<I've loved the genre ever since I played *Space Invaders* and *Centipede* in the arcades. *Reshoot* can be traced back to an old horizontal shooter I developed in the early Nineties, but never completed. In 2015 I resurrected the original code and felt the urge to push this project over the finish line. I'd say *Reshoot* got the reception it deserves, while *RESHOOT R* was much better received. It was a pleasure to read the reviews and comments on social media channels, YouTube, English Amiga Board, and A1k, and talk to people at events that I visited. />

WHEN DID YOU START DEVELOPING THE THIRD RESHOOT GAME?

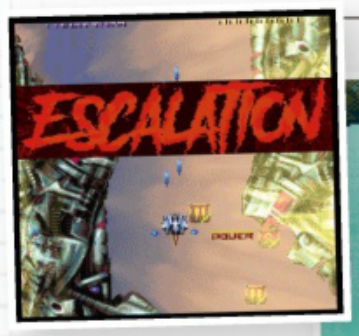
<Development of *Reshoot Proxima 3* started almost the same day that *RESHOOT R* was released: May 2019 I am very pleased to have Kevin Saunders on board, who drew the pixels for *Reshoot* and *RESHOOT R*. Martin Ahman of *RESHOOT R* fame takes care of the music again. Both are great dudes with great expertise and a pleasure to work with. />

WILL THERE BE A PHYSICAL RELEASE TO LOOK FORWARD TO?

<Absolutely. The game is developed so that it runs from CD-ROM on a CD32. That was always the goal. There will be a basic version and a *Signature Edition* that features an audio soundtrack and a booklet. />

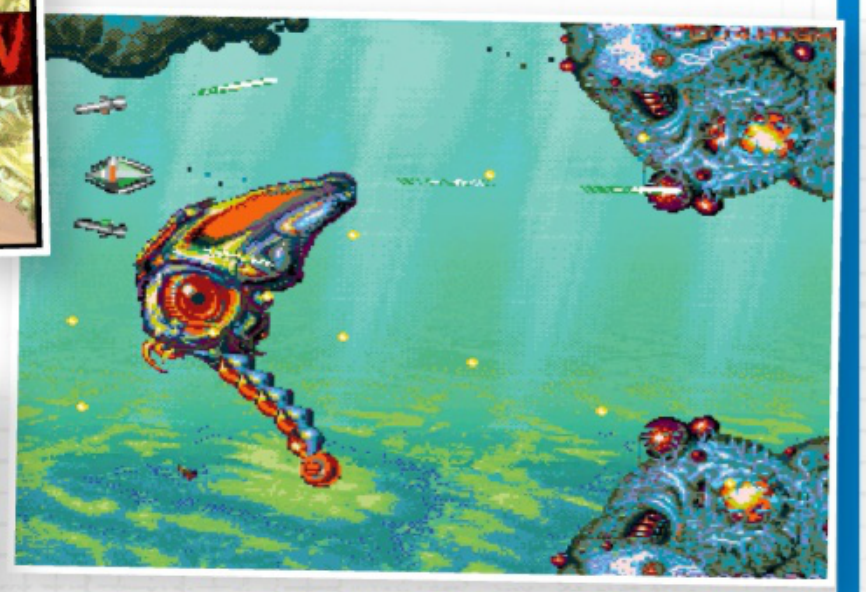
ANY OTHER PROJECTS?

<I would love to port *RESHOOT R* to Mega Drive someday and develop a modern version of my first commercial C64 game *Twinky Goes Hiking*. My goal is to open a game development studio and earn a living from developing games. />



<!--- [AMIGA] THE VERTICALLY SCROLLING RESHOOT PROXIMA 3 WILL FEATURE POWER-UPS. --->

<!--- [AMIGA] A BOSS FROM THE ORIGINAL RESHOOT. --->



DATA BURST

LYKIA – THE LOST ISLAND

<INFO BY: PULSAR (DEVELOPER), PSYTRONIK/PROTOVISION (PHYSICAL VERSION PUBLISHERS) FORMAT: C64, PLUS/4 PRICE: FREE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD/PHYSICAL TBC VISIT: PSYTRONIK.ITCH.IO/LYKIA (DIGITAL) />

<BODY> **On her 16th birthday, Nora is sent to pick fruit by her mother – and unleashes a magic spell that affects everyone in the land.** Nora must explore, talk to people and animals, and then find the objects she needs to remove the spell. Both formats look superb, mimicking the style of classic SNES RPGs and there's a great intro. Interacting with people shows portraits of the characters, while other nice touches include the clouds drifting by and animated animals. Talking to people reveals what you need to do next, while Clouseau will give you hints at the press of a key and Gomez will help you save your progress. Shortcut keys will also help you use important objects, such as the Navigator that shows exits from the current screen and the Net to catch fairies (which replenish Nora's health). Once you find a sword you can fight back against the enemies that drain your health (shown as hearts). There is quite a bit of backtracking in the early areas, but the charm of the dialogue and the depth of the story will keep you interested. After the amazing *The Briley Witch Chronicles* on C64, this is another superb RPG and a brilliant time-sink. Psytronik (psytronik.net) and Protovision (protovision.games) will publish the physical versions this autumn. </BODY>

SCORE: 91%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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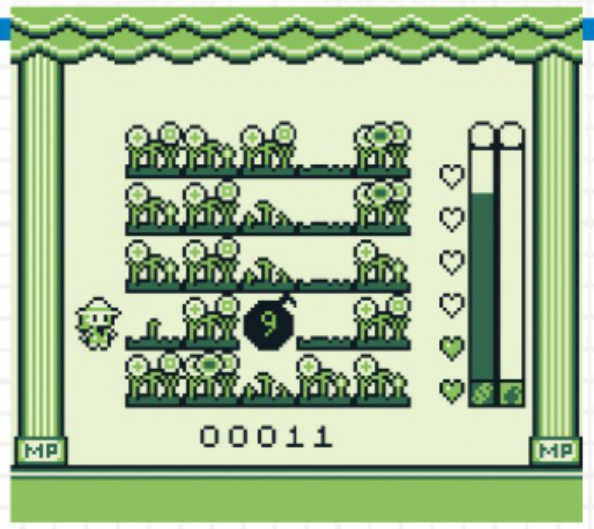
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT



MAGIPANELS

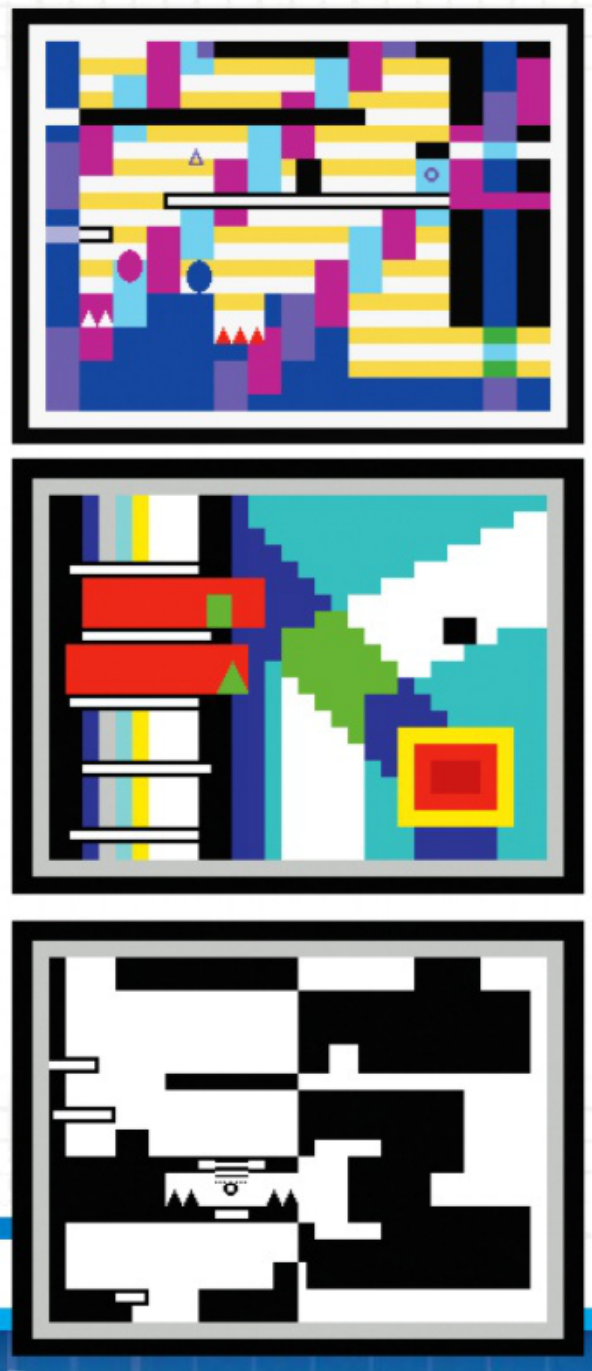
<INFO BY: BOWNLY (DEVELOPER), INCUBOS GAMES (PUBLISHER)
VISIT: BIT.LY/MAGIPANELS – FREE DEMO AT BOWNLY.ITCH.IO/MAGIPANELS
FORMAT:GAME BOY PRICE: $4.99 DIGITAL/$44.99 BOXED CARTRIDGE />

<BODY> **To test magic users from around the world, the Magipanels talent show was invented.** Contestants use their special powers to manipulate the grid, flipping either a row or column of panels to create matches. As they earn points, a special ability bar fills – allowing them to use their extra power (such as defusing a bomb). As you play, you unlock lots of extras – there are eight playable characters, sixteen themes (changing the tiles) and five tunes. It's an interesting twist on the match-three formula and looks rather cute on the Game Boy. It will need some perseverance to understand the rules and start to unlock the extras, but the free demo is there to try. One for puzzle fanatics to look at. </BODY>

SCORE: **72%**

TRIANGLE CIRCLE SQUARE AKA /\ O [ ]

<INFO BY: GMD (ROBERT 'GLOBE' PECNIK, MAREK 'MARCO' CHORVAT, MARIAN 'GOLDMASTER' VYBOSTOK) FORMAT:ATARI 8-BIT (64K, PAL & NTSC) PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD VISIT: ATARI8.DEV/FINAL_ASSAULT />



<BODY> **This is a very stylish game, inspired by the impressionist art of Kandinsky and Mondrian.** You control the shapes as you explore; Circle jumps, Triangle shoots and Square breaks platforms. Collecting a shape icon changes you to that shape. You must dodge or shoot the enemies, avoid the spikes, and find your way around the abstract landscapes. Adding to the atmosphere are the animations giving the shapes character and the excellent music on both formats. A refreshing change and an original idea that is certainly worth playing. </BODY>

SCORE: **84%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> MICHAEL THOMASSON OF GOOD DEAL GAMES – GOODDEALGAMES.COM – INTRODUCES DARK KEEP FOR THE ATARI 2600 </INTRO>

<BODY> **"*Dark Keep* is a faithful rendition of the [Milton Bradley] board game *Dark Tower*," Michael proudly tells us.** "Our programmer is Edward Smith, and our artist is Kevin Mosley." A home-console conversion was long overdue, with board game sequel *Return To Dark Tower* having been funded on Kickstarter last year.

"When Ed first approached me about doing the graphics, I was unfamiliar with the board game," Kevin adds. "It was a lot of fun coming up with how to draw the screens on the Atari 2600. I love the challenge of drawing with the playfield, two sprites and sometimes adding the ball or missiles. Throughout development, I thought of it as an original game. I think Ed's concept for how to implement moves around the map and then display statuses, battles and the inventory was brilliant. It plays in a very streamlined way. I still play the game often and haven't gotten tired of it." Kevin's full-screen graphics are certainly looking impressive, and we can't wait to play the final game. </BODY>

<!--- [ATARI 2600] "I IMAGINED THE 'LOST' SCREEN BEING A PATH ENDING AT A SCRAGGLY FOREST," SAYS ARTIST KEVIN MOSLEY. --->

COMMODORE 64 MEMORIES

The team reminisces about the beloved breadbin

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Both Tim and Nick have owned Commodore's iconic computer, so in keeping with the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the hit machine, they decided to get together and share their memories of it – and they even let Darran join in as the token Amstrad owner.

NICK

The Commodore 64 is 40 years old this year. Can you remember the first time you encountered the beige bread bin?

DARRAN

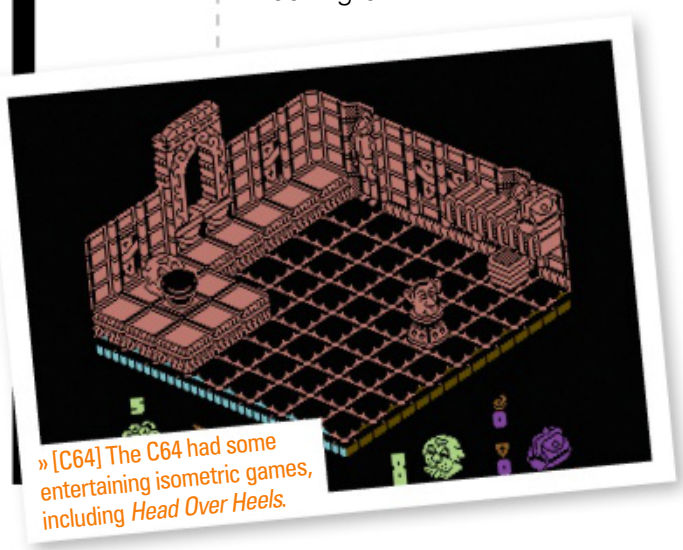
I probably saw one setup at Densham's, but the first time I remember playing one was at Paul Elkin's house, because his brother Mark had one.

TIM

Yep, when the huge box arrived at our house after my parents bought it for us. My brother and I weren't supposed to set it up, but we did and played *Crazy Kong* for our impetuous sins.

NICK

I first saw one at a family friend's house, they were playing *Impossible Mission* and *Commando*. I'll be honest though, I didn't even know what it was at the time, and by that point it was probably already knocking on.



» [C64] The C64 had some entertaining isometric games, including *Head Over Heels*.

» [C64] *Monty On The Run* isn't just a fantastic game, it also has a sensational soundtrack.

DARRAN

I have to be honest when I saw it at Densham's it never impressed, because I saw things like *Renegade* and *Short Circuit* running on it and those are not the kind of games you want to be using to highlight the capabilities of the C64.

TIM

Commando was great, I really enjoyed playing that. Was *Renegade* that bad? Maybe I'm thinking of *Target: Renegade*. I enjoyed *Head Over Heels* and the rest of *The Magnificent Seven* pack. Well, maybe aside from *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* – I had no idea what was going on with that one.

DARRAN

Target: Renegade on C64 looked great, but it was generally considered to be pretty weak as it was only one-player, where the Speccy and Amstrad versions were two-player.

Renegade just had that horribly blocky look that many C64 games suffered from. What are your thoughts of the C64, Nick?

NICK

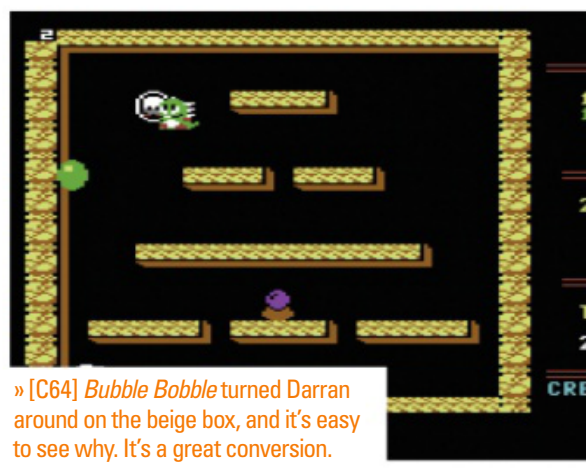
I was given my cousin's old C64 around 1994, and the first thing I did was load up familiar names from the Master System like *Double Dragon* and *Space Harrier*. That gave me a pretty poor first impression, and loading tapes was a faff compared to cartridges, but then I started delving into other games like *Kikstart 2* and had fun with them.

DARRAN

You've just reminded me that there was a kid at Oakmead called Luke Palmer and he had a C64, and that's when I realised how good games like *IK+* and *Bubble Bobble* were on it. *Bubble Bobble* in particular made the Amstrad version look like utter garbage.

TIM

Loading the tapes was an absolute nightmare looking back. Did it really take 30 minutes to load some games? I do remember it feeling like a very long time, even longer because I was younger and frantically waiting for the loading screen to be over. One time I started a game loading while still doing my homework. It had just finished loading and my mum came in, saw the red power light, got a bit cross and turned it off. I was devastated.



» [C64] *Bubble Bobble* turned Darran around on the beige box, and it's easy to see why. It's a great conversion.

» Commodore's follow-up to the VIC-20 was huge on release and is still going strong 40 years later.

NICK

Oof, that's harsh. Did you ever actually use your machine for any of the more 'worthy' activities like doing homework or learning to program?

TIM

Good god no. Well aside from filling the screen with 'Tim Rules OK' because that's what you did then. We did have a coding book from Marks & Spencer of all places, and got a babysitter who said she could type to input all the Peeks and Pokes. Ended up with a wee skiing game not unlike *Horace Goes Skiing*. But that poor woman, she earned her babysitting money that day.

NICK

I dabbled with a little programming and made a very basic game around the random number function. Unfortunately I'd messed up and my sister would always win, so that put me off further tinkering for years.

DARRAN

I don't recall any of my friends using their C64s for anything other than games. And you can't blame them, because the machine had some belters. I truly became jealous of my C64-owning mates when I discovered games like *Armalyte* and *Katakis*. Amazing visuals, silky-smooth scrolling and great sound. In fact we should probably mention our favourite C64 SID tracks.

TIM

Not really a track but the Ocean loading tune is burned into my brain, it's awesome and I heard it so many times.

NICK

Rob Hubbard's theme for *Monty On The Run* is the first one that springs to mind. Also, it's not a C64 track as such but when I was a teenager I got into Machinae Supremacy, a metal band that used the SID as an instrument.

DARRAN

Monty On The Run is the first thing that comes to mind for me as well, it's an astonishingly energetic track and I never get bored listening to it. Didn't a few C64 songs end up in commercial tracks as well?

NICK

They did! There was even a plagiarism controversy with Timbaland, where he had basically taken a C64 remix of Janne Suni's Amiga track *Acidjazzed Evening* and plopped bits into Nelly Furtado's song *Do It*.

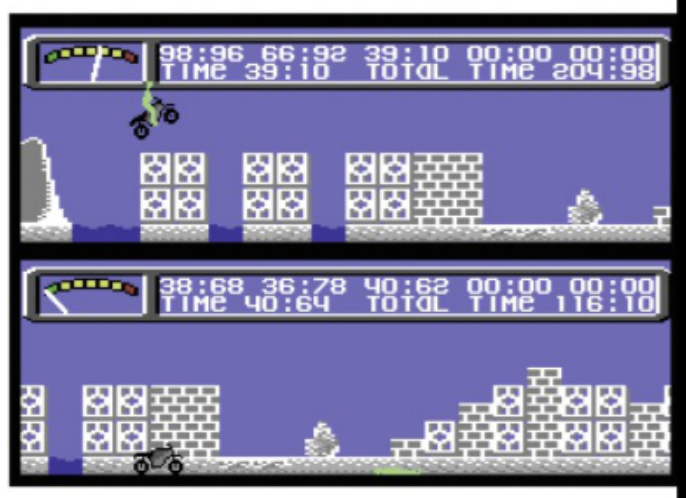
DARRAN

The same thing happened with David Whittaker's *Lazy Jones*, as one of the tracks got used in a Zombie Nation single. Naughty, naughty, very naughty as Ebeneezer Goode would say. ✱

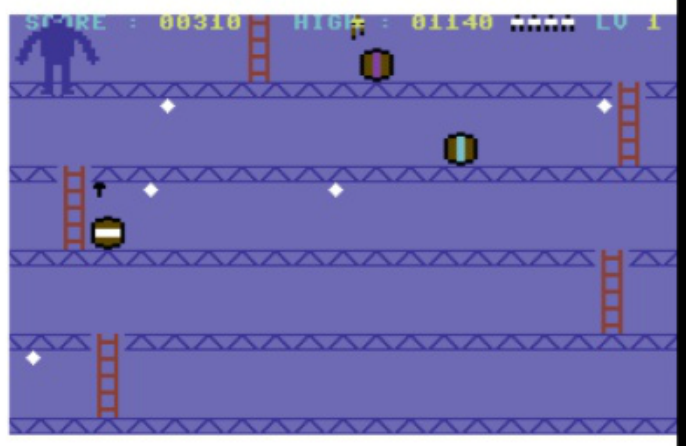
> "I dabbled with a little programming and made a very basic game"
>
> **NICK THORPE**

» [C64] Shoot-'em-up fiend Darran was wowed by *Armalyte*? We're as shocked as you are.

» [C64] *Commando* was a fun conversion, with fast action and memorable tunes.



» [C64] We don't know how Nick played *Kikstart 2* as a kid, as he's rubbish now.



» [C64] Tim's introduction to *Crazy Kong* came rather earlier than it was supposed to.

READERS REACT

What's your favourite C64 music?

Games That Weren't

Like trying to choose your favourite child, but I'd go with *Game Over* by Martin Galway. An epic tune with amazing digital drums that brings back very fond memories. Less said about the game, though didn't mind the cover art as a kid.

Matthew Taylor

The loader music from *Green Beret* is a beautiful composition, and I remember it and many of the classic SID tunes elevating what was often a simple arcade game into something much grander in my mind as a kid.

Funky Isolation

Level 1 theme in *Batman: The Movie*. I drove my parents nuts by playing the game on the living room TV, to such an extent that they bought me my own 14-inch TV for my room.

Paul Phillips

Rambo for me, from the loading screen all the way through it's sublime. Often loaded more for the music than the game.

Carleton Handley

Cybernoid II. To me it has the quintessential SID sound and it's a long enough tune so it doesn't become repetitive. Not that I could get very far before game over in that game!

Stuart Wilson

Far too many to choose from, but I rate Martin Galway's *Comic Bakery* as one of my all-time favourite SIDs, followed closely by Jeroen Tel's *Noisy Pillars*.

ausretrogamer

Charles Deenan's 7+ minute *Zamzara* title composition is an aural masterpiece. The other half of Maniacs Of Noise created an absolute banger of a SID chiptune. Honourable mention must go to Keith Tinman for his *Midnight Resistance* soundtrack.

Vince White

Gari Biasillo's tunes for *Joe Blade* and *Target: Renegade* were awesome.

Sinfour

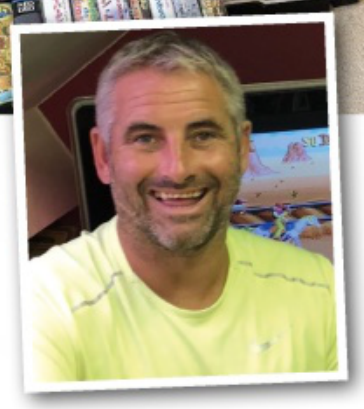
The Last Ninja for sure! Loading time between next stages was never a problem with such good music by Ben Daglish and Anthony Lees (may they both rest in piece). Amazing soundtrack overall.

Garry Barrett

Master Of Magic was awesome. But, poignantly, the closing theme for *Mayhem In Monsterland* does it for me.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



BIO

NAME:
Chris Bowman

LOCATION:
North-East England

FAVOURITE GAME:
Chaos

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Neo Geo AES

COLLECTION WORTH:
"I shudder at that"

INSTAGRAM:
@retrogamingguy

THE RETRO HUNTER

Chris Bowman loves hunting for games as much as playing them

Collectors store their gaming collections in all manner of interesting places, and Chris Bowman has taken his to a whole new level – his loft.

"Having an expanding family meant I either boxed up my relatively small collection at the time or found it a new home," he tells us. "I decided to convert my attic solely for the purpose of a games room."

Chris' decision has meant he's found a new haven for his retro gaming. "I think you can never have enough space," he admits. "I have trimmed down to suit the space and my needs over time but realistically you can never have enough space. My attic currently houses around 18 complete sets of games and due to space constraints I don't [really] do console variants."

Chris has been collecting games for over 25 years and revealed to us that "owning a videogame store" helped him to amass quite the collection. Owning 18 complete system collections is quite the feat and we were keen to know if Chris considered himself a collector or a hoarder. "I'd be lying if I said everything got played, so hoarding and the hunt is more the case these days," he admits.

Having recently finished a complete Wii U set, Chris is setting himself the somewhat impossible task of going for a full set of promotional Xbox 360 games, which sounds quite the challenge. "There is no defining list and not every game will have had a promotional copy made," he admits. He's otherwise happy with his collection, particularly his SNES and Neo Geo collections.

"I fell in love with the SNES from the first time I played *Mario Kart*, *ActRaiser* and *Contra*," he continues. "I used to import games a lot when I was a kid. I collect UK, US and Japan releases and currently have around 1,000 boxed games."

In addition to retro, Chris also enjoys contemporary games and has amassed an impressive *Uncharted* collection. "My love for the *Uncharted* series was shown when my store won the best advertising campaign in the UK for *Uncharted 4* and I won a trip to Dubai."

So what advice would Chris give to anyone thinking of starting their own collection? "Decide from the offset what you want and make a list. If you're set on hunting, try not to leave the high-value games until last as they will more than likely jump up in price when you finally want a copy. Stick to a budget if you can and hunt for bargains. There are thousands of games out there, so if you miss one another will eventually turn up." ✱

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY
"*Conker* for the N64 was Rare at its best with all the movie references, the humour and the graphics and sound pushing the console to its limit. It's just awesome."
PAID: £30

METAL SLUG 3
"The addition of vomiting zombies and branching paths, combined with the tight controls and pixel-perfect graphics, make this one of my go-to games."
PAID: £250

CONTRA GAMES
"*Contra* has to be one of the all-time best shooters. However, I hated that Konami changed all the characters to robots for the PAL release."
PAID: £30 EACH

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

BRUCE LEE

"I loved it on the Spectrum and Kagesan did an amazing job on the Master System. An all-time great."

PAID: £40 (MS)

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

CHAOS

■ "Originally recorded around my mate's many moons ago. Each game is never the same and it's one game I could never get bored of. It's literally my Holy Grail."

PAID: THE COST OF A TAPE

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

COMMODORE 64

Commodore's 8-bit wonder can fetch high prices, with even non-working copies hitting **£80.** Boxed prices vary based on condition, games and packaging. Prices can reach **£260,** but **£120** seems to be more reasonable.

PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE

PAL Sega versions for Activision's sequel can get quite pricey. The Mega Drive version can reach **£20,** while its 32X and Mega-CD counterparts can reach **£260** and **£90.** Ouch!

SUPER MARIO LAND

Mario's first Game Boy adventure starts at **£5** if you just fancy owning a cart. Want a boxed copy? That will cost at least **£50.**

LEISURE SUIT LARRY

Larry's first lewd adventure is expensive, with disk versions starting at **£60** and reaching as much as **£180!**

STRANGLEHOLD

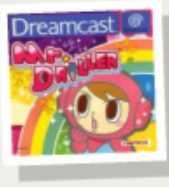
This *Hard Boiled* sequel is still cheap with Xbox 360 copies typically starting at just a quid. We've seen it reach as much as **£10,** though.

VECTORMAN

There seems to be little love for *Vectorman*. Complete PAL copies rarely pass **£23,** meaning there's still time to discover the game.

LIGHT FORCE

Fancy a blast? The Spectrum version starts at **£3** and typically reaches **£8.** That's quite reasonable considering its quality.



MR DRILLER

PAL PlayStation copies of Namco's cute and colourful puzzler can easily reach **£33,** while the Dreamcast version can hit **£24.** Grab it now as we're convinced it will start rising in price.

CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE

Despite being backwards compatible, the price for this fun sequel remains low. If you're paying more than **£10** you're paying too much.

STRIKERS 1945

You can buy Psikyo's shooter digitally on most contemporary systems for around **£8.** If you want the Saturn version that Darran owns you can expect to pay between **£26** to **£40** for a copy.

HOW MUCH?!

MASTERS OF COMBAT

SIMS' limited fighter recently hit **£1,000,** proving that sometimes, longevity has no bearing on how much you want to own a game. What's interesting here is that it wasn't an auction, suggesting someone really wanted it for their collection and quickly snapped it up.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

PARK LIFE

Nick remembers his childhood arcade

Picture the scene: it's 1997, and it's my birthday. I've got a friend over and we're playing the Mega Drive, while waiting to go to the Harvey Centre's newest attraction, Sega Park. I had already seen it just before it opened, and I couldn't have been more excited. The arcade dominated the upper floor of the shopping centre, with images of Sonic adorning the walls and the carpet, and it was filled with showcase games from deluxe *Daytona USA 2* units and *Top Skater* to fighting games in gigantic Super Megalo 2 cabinets. We had never had anything like it in Harlow, and if you could have taken my happiest childhood dream and built it, I don't know that it would have been any different.

My excitement turned out to be for nothing, as I did not get to visit Sega Park on that day. In a completely ridiculous turn of events, I got my foot stuck behind the radiator in my bedroom, and in pulling it free managed to wrench the radiator from the wall. The rest of the day was spent waiting for an engineer to come and repair it. In the end we had to wait until after Christmas to go for the first time, but after the initial stress of that day, Sega Park was a blessing for my mum – every time we were in town, a couple of 50p pieces was all it took to buy some peace.

The result was that I had many of my formative arcade gaming experiences there, from drawing a crowd as I beat *Virtua Fighter 3tb* to getting challenged by a stranger for the first time on *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*. *Virtual On*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Silent Scope*, *Capcom Vs SNK* and The *House Of The Dead 2* were just some of the games I experienced for the first time there. Some games, like *The Ocean Hunter*, I never saw anywhere else.

During school holidays, my sister and I would cycle into town for freeplay mornings, in which £5 would net us a few glorious hours in which running out of coins was no concern. She was always more fond of the ticket-redemption games, before those were cleared out to make way for an adults-only fruit machine corner, but we loved playing *Dancing Stage Euromix* and air hockey together. On other days, if I wasn't playing trading-card games at Marquee Models, you could probably find me with friends I'd made there at Sega Park or the Burger King next door.

Sadly, the fun didn't last. Harlow's Sega Park was due to move to a smaller venue in early 2003, despite some objections from local councillors who were concerned that it might encourage underage gambling, but this never came to pass and the arcade closed instead. It was probably inevitable to be honest – the arcade market was beginning to decline and machine maintenance had started getting pretty sloppy, leading to one memorable *Virtua Fighter 4* session in which I had to try to play without being able to move forward. I still can't help but think that it would have been nice to have had local access to *OutRun 2* and *Ghost Squad*, had it gone on a year or two longer.

There is one advantage to the short life of my local Sega Park, though. I'm not usually the type to pursue goals with my game collection, but that lifespan of just over five years has made it viable for me to try to get every game that was available at the arcade, where home versions exist. Actually determining what was there involves a combination of examining old footage and photographs, asking other players and of course my own memory, and there are of course plenty of games that were never converted. Even with those that were, the ports are sometimes somewhat diminished – *Silent Scope* just isn't the same without that gun – but I think I'm getting pretty close to my goal now.

Sega Park wasn't the biggest or best arcade I've ever been to, but it was special to me because it shaped me as a gamer. It existed at a time when arcade games still had a technological lead, and when I was old enough and local enough to appreciate it. It's bittersweet to think we're unlikely to ever have anything like it again, but as long as I have my memories and a Dreamcast copy of *Crazy Taxi*, that's OK.

Special thanks to Jim Brown, Ellen Pewsey, Bryan Young, Harlow Museum and the Harvey Centre for their assistance in providing images.

HIT LIST

The Sega Park games I'm still looking to pick up

GTI CLUB
It's not a contemporary port, but the Wii game has the same track layout as the arcade original. It's pretty expensive now, though.

POLICE 24/7
The PS2 version of this unique lightgun game replicates the arcade version's motion sensors using a webcam, which is pretty cool.

VAMPIRE NIGHT
Another lightgun game for the PS2, this Sega/Namco collaboration isn't too expensive so it's probably going to be my next buy.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4
I've already got *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*, but Sega Park had the vanilla version so I really should grab it at some point.

VIRTUA TENNIS
Playing the first game at Sega Park convinced me to get the sequel, but I still don't own the original. That needs to be fixed.

TOTAL TIME
022
+100
Watch out
[DREAMCAST] ADMITTEDLY, SOME GAMES LIKE SILENT SCOPE AREN'T QUITE THE SAME WITHOUT THEIR CABINETS.
LIMIT TIME EXTENDED
Front Loop to In
[ARCADE] TOP SKATER'S UNIQUE CABINET WAS ONE OF SEGA PARK'S BIGGEST ATTRACTIONS EARLY ON.
SEGA
THE OPENING OF SEGA PARK WAS A BIG EVENT, WITH THE LOCAL RADIO STATION ALSO TAKING PART.

THE FIFTH EPISODE OF GAMESMASTER SERIES SEVEN HAS SOME PRE-OPENING FOOTAGE OF SEGA PARK.

[ARCADE] SOME GAMES GOT BELATED PORTS – MOTOR RAID WAS INCLUDED IN JUDGMENT FOR PS4 IN 2018.

GAMESMASTER'S FOOTAGE SHOWS THAT THE ARCADE FAVOURED LARGER CABINETS OVER STANDARD UPRIGHT ONES.

THE FISHING GAME GET BASS WAS POPULAR WITH PLAYERS WHEN IT ARRIVED IN 1998. [PHOTO CREDIT: HARVEY CENTRE]

YOU REALLY COULDN'T MISS SEGA PARK ON THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE HARVEY CENTRE. IT'S HUGE. [PHOTO CREDIT: JIM BROWN]

[ARCADE] EVEN PICKING THE SECRET CHARACTER AKUMA DIDN'T STOP ME LOSING TO THAT STRANGER.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE CHILDHOOD ARCADE?

Readers share the best places to misspend a youth

Tony Layzell
Coral Island, Blackpool. I can remember standing watching a crowd playing the hydraulic version of *Space Harrier* in the entrance way back in the Eighties. It was amazing, like looking into the future.

Mark R Jones
Billing Aquadrome in Northampton, 1985. Summer days, outdoor swimming pool, halfway through – Black Jacks and Fruit Salads then off to the arcade games – *Bomb Jack*, *Mr Do!*, *Circus Charlie*, *Boot Hill*, *Carnival*, *Track & Field*, *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids* and *Frogger* were all there. Happy days!

Mário Ferreira
It was in Costa da Caparica in Lisbon with *Daytona USA* centre stage... back in the early Nineties it was something the likes I have never seen before. I was used to *Super Monaco GP* on the Mega Drive and was absolutely jaw-dropped when I saw it.

Made Man
Sega World Sydney was probably my favourite growing up. It was a full theme park, but the arcade was set to freeplay and had the latest games. Playing *Virtua Fighter 3* on a Megalo cab is an unforgettable experience.

Aaron Wren
My favourite arcade would have to be South Parade Pier, Portsmouth. It was walking distance from home so lots of days spent there playing *Double Dragon* and being wowed by the likes of *Out Run*, *Street Fighter II* and others.

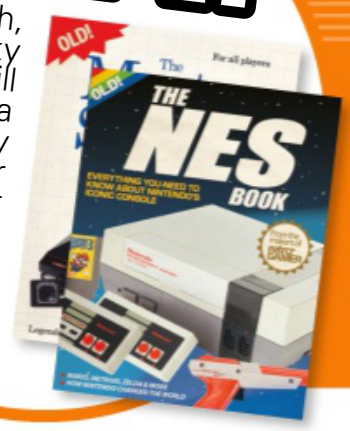
Skeleton O'Rourke
Boscombe Pier in the early Eighties was absolutely incredible! My cousin and I played *Star Wars*, *Carnival*, *Gorf*, *Asteroids* and many more. Nearby, Bournemouth pier, also great, where I discovered *Robotron: 2084*. Great times, and thank fuck for MAME and other emulators!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD VIA THE MAGIC OF ELECTRONIC MAIL

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



STAR LETTER

MEGA MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
When I first heard about the Mega Drive Mini 2 and how it would have Mega-CD games, I was really excited because it's just too expensive to collect the real discs. I didn't get my dream reveal of *Snatcher*, but I'm a big fan of RPGs so I got even more hyped when I saw the *Lunar* games and *Popful Mail* announced.

Now the full list of games is out for the international version of the console. It's bad that we're not getting as many Mega-CD games to start with, but what's worse is that none of those ones are on it, even though there are official English translated versions of those games. Why are we getting screwed here – does Sega just not think that we want them?
Scott Longman

Unfortunately Scott, as is so often the case when there are problems in releasing old games, it all comes down to copyright issues. All three of those games were released in North America by Working Designs, which produced its own English translations and recorded new voice acting. Because the copyright for those elements of the games was held by Working Designs, even the original Japanese developers and publishers can't re-release the English versions without acquiring a licence. Sadly, it appears that an agreement couldn't be reached to include them on the Mega Drive Mini 2.

» [Mega-CD] It's a shame that these incredibly expensive games won't be finding a new audience.

» [Mega-CD] Writing a new translation is one solution, but it would come at a hefty cost.

» [Game Boy Advance] What's particularly impressive about *Rayman Advance* is that it was a launch year release

TOTAL ECLIPSE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I loved your article on Digital Eclipse! Seeing their logo on your magazine brings me back to a handheld conversion of one of my favourite games of all time: *Rayman*. *Rayman Advance* is now far inferior to the latter DSi *Rayman* port but back in 2001, Digital Eclipse's attempt of a GBA conversion of a PlayStation/Saturn game is honestly something to be in awe at!

Kind regards,
Matteo Fossi

We're glad you enjoyed the feature – Digital Eclipse has been doing great things for retro gaming, and deserved that spotlight. *Rayman Advance* was very impressive in its day, and it must have been liberating to work on a machine like the Game Boy Advance after having done conversions like *Dragon's Lair* for the Game Boy Color.

MUTANTS ON THE MIND

Hi everyone,
First of all I just wanna say I love the magazine so, so much! Every month it's like meeting up with an old friend.

Secondly I'm a huge *X-Men* fan and I was wondering if you've ever done a feature on the games they have starred in. There are many going right back to the NES and SNES and I think there have even been games that were cancelled, I'd love to see a feature and find out more about why they were cancelled.

Thank you so much for the wonderful mag, stay safe.
Richard Peck

Thanks for the kind words, Richard. You'll surely have seen our feature on *X-Men Legends* in issue 220, but we've never done a feature about the broader series. It's a great idea, so we'll look into getting it together. You're right to say there are scrapped games too – we've included a screenshot of the intriguing 32X one here.

» [32X] *X-Men* for 32X looked promising, mixing 3D environments with pre-rendered character sprites.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [PC] Gaming narrative goes far beyond words – environmental storytelling is often just as important.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Holiday Hijinks

The team has been taking some time off lately. Andy managed to catch up with a lot of things he'd been hoping to watch, while Darran's trip to Malta was going really well until he fell off a wall, nearly crushed his camera and injured his knee. When this issue hits shelves, Nick will be enjoying a week off too, probably playing Saturn games. Meanwhile, Tim just shames us all with his unstoppable work ethic across two magazines.

TELL ME A TALE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I'm a new reader of yours, and I was wondering if there could be/already has been a focus on narrative and its development in retro gaming? I currently work in the industry and it's the direction I want to go in! So eager to learn more/hear opinions about narrative in gaming.

I picked up a **Retro Gamer** magazine for the first time and found it fascinating! Excited for the next one talking about *BioShock*, my favourite game.

Amelia Bourke

Glad to have you on board! We can see why you like *BioShock*, as that was an extremely compelling story. Looking back, we haven't done a feature like this yet, and it would be an interesting topic to cover as it has certainly become a much more important aspect of development over the years. Give us some time to wrangle interviewees, and we'll take a look at it.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I have a question for you. Even before Sega went third party, games like *Shinobi*, *Penguin Land* and *Columns* appeared on Nintendo consoles, but did any Nintendo games ever reach Sega hardware?

Craig Daniels

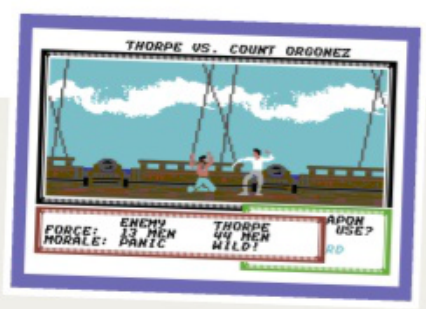
Incredibly, they did – but only once the console war was over. All seven were Japanese exclusive *Pokémon* games for Sega's Pico educational consoles, released between 2002 and 2010.

» [Pico] We're unsure if Craig was hoping for Japanese edutainment games, but that's all we've got.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What is your favourite Commodore 64 game?



Lord Arse!
Forbidden Forest. It's a 40-year-old game and very much looks it, but it still has a sense of fear and foreboding that many a modern horror game can't match. And that soundtrack…

Thorongil BlackHeart
I always liked the *Monty Mole* games, although I sucked majorly at them when I was a kid. But recently I bought a C64 Mini and… realised I still suck at them.

Anthony Cox
I have to mention *The Last Ninja 2*. An amazing technical achievement and an awesome soundtrack by the legendary Matt Gray. Still a game I enjoy playing to this day.

Sami Inkinen
Pirates! is my all-time favourite. I must have sailed in the Caribbean for weeks with a friend of mine.

Judge Drokk
Avoid the mainstream… find fun and soul in something that's original… *Jammin'* from TaskSet.

Stephen Watts
Clumsy Colin: Action Biker. A 3D isometric world with great music and smooth scrolling graphics. Like playing an 8-bit *GTA*.

C64reloaded
Impossible Mission is outstanding. The tongue-in-cheek Top Secret dossier is hilarious, the animation is breathtaking, the speech is superb and the atmosphere is tense and exciting. It's wonderfully designed and still plays brilliantly in 2022. I could stay awhile and play it FOREVER!

Mark Fletcher
Leaderboard – it set the benchmark for all other golf games that followed and still hasn't been beaten. Plus it's the only game my dad has ever played so it has that going for it as well!

retro GAMER

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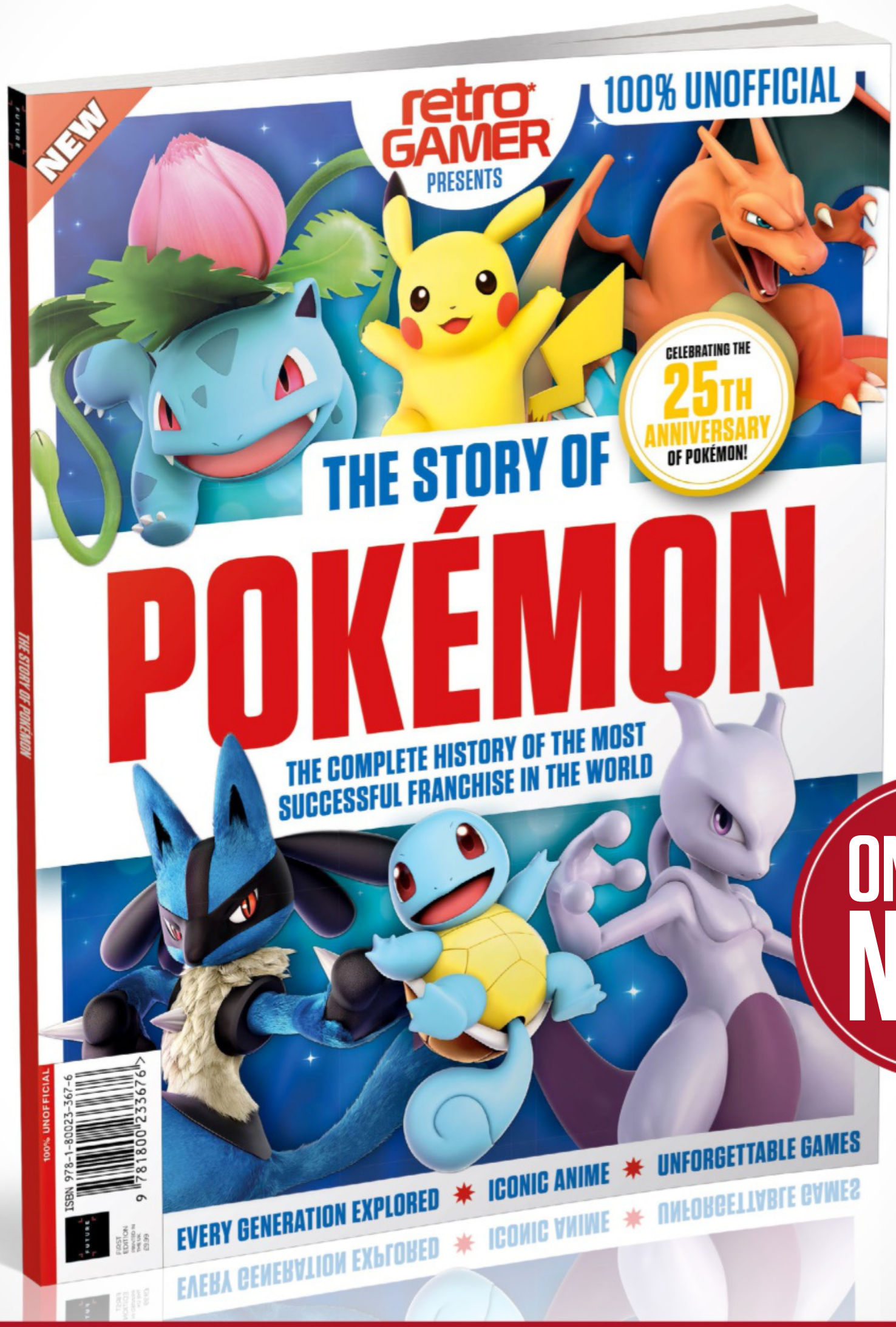

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Stranglehold

KILL, KILL AND KILL AGAIN

RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2007

» MIDWAY STUDIOS CHICAGO/TIGER HILL ENTERTAINMENT

When Microsoft announced its backwards compatibility project for the Xbox One, I became excited about the prospect of *Stranglehold* being added to it. I knew it was a long shot, but I kept hoping and would eagerly scour each new list whenever an update of new games was announced.

Stranglehold was always going to be an unlikely addition because it's ultimately a licensed game, which is a surefire way to kill any chance of a later re-release. And yet it is available to own on PC via GOG, so either communication broke down between Microsoft and Warner Bros, or Microsoft simply doesn't want me to enjoy Midway's game on the Xbox Series X. Seeing how many Warner Bros games are available via backwards compatibility I can only assume the latter.

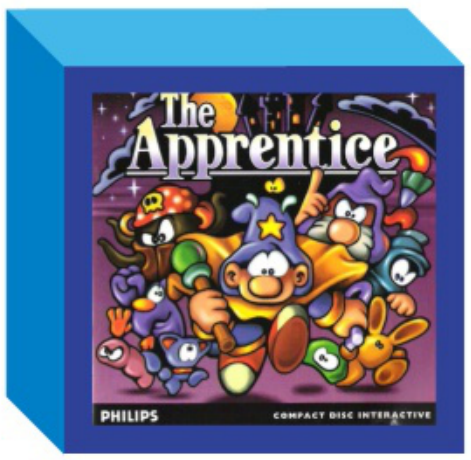
There's nothing really original about *Stranglehold*, but that's never stopped me from enjoying it. Written as an official sequel to John Woo's incredible action flick *Hard Boiled*, *Stranglehold* not only saw the return of Chow Yun-Fat as Tequila, but also of Woo, whose videogame studio Tiger Hill Entertainment collaborated on the project with Midway Studios Chicago.

With *Hard Boiled* being one of my favourite action films of all time, I was tremendously excited for *Stranglehold* and I absolutely caned it on release. If I'm honest it doesn't really take the third-person shooter in exciting new directions and it actually felt a little clunky in places when I played it a few years back, but what it does still manage to do is make you feel like you're Tequila.

Hard Boiled is a wonderfully balletic movie of fast-paced hyper kinetic action and immensely entertaining setpieces and *Stranglehold* does a similar job of capturing the fluidity and grace that Woo injected into his film. Each level of *Stranglehold* is really just an excuse to waste bad guys in as many graphic ways as possible and sometimes that's absolutely fine.

ENDGAME

THE APPRENTICE



» We don't really know why the government is so keen to push apprenticeships. We can see what's in it for the old wizard – he gets all of his odd jobs done – but when it comes to preparing a young person for real life, is this really better than an esports degree? There's only one way to find out, so let's skip to the end to see how poor old Marvin fares after his chores are done.

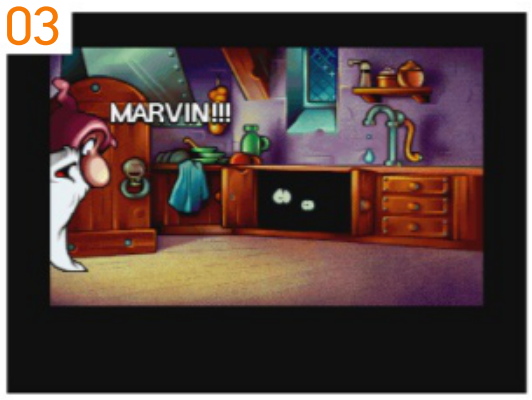
01

» With all of the day's work done, Marvin finally gets to go to bed. He's carrying a candle and his bed is under a sink. This is blatant mistreatment of an employee, there's probably mould and stuff down there.

02

» It gets worse. Not only is Marvin sleeping under the sink, but he also happens to be a bed, as the cat curls up on him with a smug smile on its face. This is a pretty undignified way to live, really. We feel bad for Marvin.

03



» But wait, there's more! The wizard turns up to ask for more menial labour, probably some help shifting jars of toenails or something. Also, just look at that dripping tap. That probably goes all night, eroding Marvin's sanity.

04

» You can see the trauma in Marvin's eyes as he gets up to fulfil yet another unreasonable request, for what will inevitably be far too little reward. Here's a life lesson, kids – ditch the Harry Potter dreams, don't become a wizard's apprentice.

05

THE ANIMALS USED IN THIS GAME
WERE IN NO WAY MISTREATED AND
ALL SCENES IN WHICH THEY
APPEARED WERE UNDER STRICT
SUPERVISION WITH THE UTMOST
CONCERN FOR THEIR HANDLING

» The animals were treated well. That's good. Next time, maybe extend the same courtesy to your main character? Otherwise he'll get in touch with Zool, Gex and Bubsy to form the Platform Stars Union, and you don't want that.

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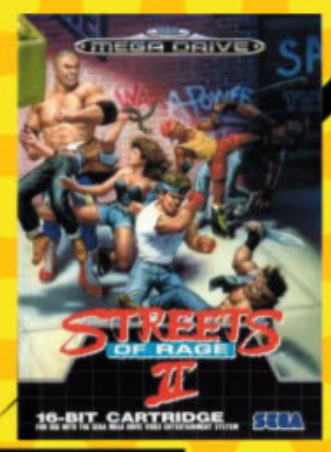

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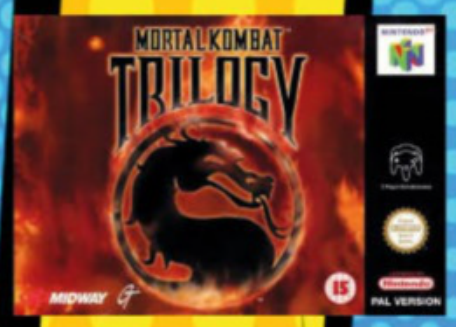

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